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OR, Sport Harry's Blind.

A STORY OF

THE HUNGRY GULCH GHOST

BY EDWARD L. WHEELER,
AUTHOR OF "DEADWOOD DICK" NOVELS, ETC.

CHAPTER I.

ROUSING A TIGER.

GOLD DUST was on the *qui vive*.
It had been rumored; at last it was as-
sured: The "city" was to have a brand new
institution.

Whether Gold Dust was in need of such
an enterprise herself and for her own

"HELLO!" EXCLAIMED SPORT HARRY. "WHAT'S THE MATTER HERE?" "THIS YOUNG
MAN MADE THE MISTAKE OF CALLING ME A LIAR."

benefit, was open to argument; but it was admitted readily that the region round about, as a whole, was.

The prospective institution was nothing more nor less than an "inebriates' sanitarium," as it was set forth in a printed prospectus; a place where chronic toppers could have the snakes removed from their boots and the wheels taken out of their heads for the reasonable sum of one hundred dollars.

"Et will be a good thing, no doubt," remarked one Jim Joy, popularly known as "Joyful Jimmie"; "but it 'pears to me to have its drawbacks, all the same. I have seen the time when I would 'a' given a thousand dollars, if I had had it to give, to get rid of the hydra-headed pythons and sich that wur a-hissin' at my heels, and it strikes me a hundred is dirt cheap—if you have got the hundred."

"Thin phwat are ye kickin' about?" demanded Felix Shea, a popular young Irishman. "Phwat is dhe dhrawback ye minton?"

"Why, the circular says ye get cured to stay cured, don't ye see?" explained Joyful Jimmie.

"Och! batheration to it!" cried Shea, firing the prospectus to the ground. "Sure, it is none av it Oi am wantin,' no more Oi am."

"The same here," agreed Joyful. "What would you and me do of a pay day, if we couldn't take on a reasonable jag of jig-water? I believe it is a good thing, but it is entirely too radical."

"Begorra, dhat is dhe wurred, Jimmie," declared Felix.

Those around them laughed at their earnestness over the matter, and the whole crowd fell to discussing it, while they awaited the coming of the stage that afternoon.

Gold Dust was a live camp, in the centre of a wide mining district, with numerous smaller camps in the vicinity. It was a promising "city," situated in Hungry Gulch, a region that had become noted for its rich discoveries and big mines.

This young city had a curiosity in the form of a haunted house. The house in question was a big one, built of brick and stone, and it was known as Hough's Folly. It had been built by one Henry Hough, several years before the time of our story, and it had never yet been occupied. Ten years later the property was sold for a song.

Henry Hough was a gold magnate in his day, a bold speculator, and immensely rich. A rich vein having been struck in Hungry Gulch, he bought it up, and was going to give it the greatest boom a mine ever had. He started a town, calling it Hough City, and built a mansion residence that would have done credit to a city in fact. About the time the house was completed, Hough died, and the mine petering out about the same time, the place was abandoned.

So it stood for a period of ten years, when it was bought up by the Central Silver Syndicate, of which two men named Seth Dalton and Alf Godwin were the head. They called the place Gold Dust, and, as rich strikes were made almost immediately, the town took on a boom and soon had a big population. But no one could occupy the Hough mansion, and Dalton & Godwin were threatening to raze it to the ground. It was haunted; there was no question about that. No one could be induced to spend more than one night there, and those who had tried it not only would not go into the house again, but made haste to get out of Gold Dust as well—"dusted," as it were.

There was a standing offer of \$500 to the man who could solve the mystery and lay the ghost.

It was about the time of the talk of pulling down the mansion and making use of the material in putting up another building, that the advance agent of a Keely cure concern, came along looking for a likely place to open a sanitarium.

The Hough mansion filled his eye completely as a most excellent building for the purpose, the best he had ever seen, as he frankly declared; and he began bargaining for it forthwith. He would not take a refusal, and finally Dalton & Godwin rented the house at a figure highly satisfactory to all parties concerned.

The advance agent took hold immediately, had the house thoroughly cleaned, and in a little while a goodly lot of furniture came along wherewith to gladden the interior. It was apparent that there was money back of the enterprise, and the agent declared that they were not in the habit of doing things in a half-way manner. And, as a finishing touch, over the door appeared the sign, in big gold letters—

GOLD DUST GOLD CURE.

And now, on this day that witnesses the opening of our story, the head of the concern, with his corps of assistants, was looked for.

"By the way," remarked one Harry Meyers, better known as "Handsome" Harry, the Sport, "I wonder what they will do with the ghost, when they come to open their concern?"

"Begorra, dhat same is phwat Oi have been t'inkin' about mesel'," declared Felix Shea. "Sure, and dhey can play dhe Saint Pathrick act wid dhe snakes, Oi see no rayson phwy dhey should not be able to git away wid wan poor craytur' of a ghost all right."

"Would it not be a good idea for them to catch it and tame it, and apply it profitably in dispelling the jim-jams?" suggested the sport.

"You mean make it a part of the cure?" asked Joyful Jimmie.

"Yes."

"Et would be enough in itself in my opinion," said the old bummer—for such in truth he was.

"What is this you are talking about?" asked the advance agent of the gold-cure concern, Edward Murphy by name. "What's the matter with the mansion? This is not the first hint I have heard. What is it?"

"Do you mean to say that you do not know the house is haunted?" asked Handsome Harry, in surprise.

"This is the first I have heard of it, on my word."

"And been here as long as you have! Well, well, that points a pretty shrewd play on the part of Seth Dalton and Alf Godwin, hang me if it don't. They have kept it pretty still."

"Begorra, it must be deaf, dumb, and blind ye have been, fri'nd Murphy," cried Felix Shea, "dhat ye have not heard av dhat. Sure, Oi could 'av' told ye mesel' fur dhe askin'. Everybody knows dhat dhere is dhe divil's own ghost in dhat house."

"I wonder if this fact is likely to injure our business prospects?" inquired Murphy of Handsome Harry.

"Wouldn't wonder if it did," was the reply. "If you can get a patient to spend a night in that house, you may make up your mind that he is desperately in earnest, that's all."

"Well, had I known of this in the first place, I might have backed out, but

as it is we have got the house and are all ready for business. We'll have to lay the ghost, that's all. Ah! here comes the stage—and an extra one behind it, as I live!"

"Sure, it looks loike dhey have come," said Shea.

"Yes, they have come, sure enough," assured Murphy, with enthusiasm. "Now we'll soon have our palatial sanatorium open for business. There is hope for even you, my friend."

That was not said to Shea, but addressed to Joyful Jimmie.

"Wull, now, I should hope thar was," Jimmie made haste to respond. "I would want to shuffle off this mortal coil instanter, ef I thought thar wasn't, my good feller. I am only waitin' fer pay day to come around again, that's all, then hooray!"

The stages came on apace, and presently drew up in front of the Dalton House and stopped.

This was the leading hotel, and was owned by Seth Dalton, and named for himself. There was little in Hungry Gulch that Dalton or Godwin, or both together, did not own.

When the regular stage stopped, that being the one in the lead, the first man to alight was a good-looking, fearless-faced fellow, with dark hair and mustache and keen, penetrating black eyes of magnetic power. He was roughly clad.

Numerous other passengers followed him, and, the other stage having stopped, that, too, was discharging its complement. There was first a portly, serious-faced man, well dressed in a suit of black and wearing a heavy gold chain. Immediately after him came other men, followed by three women, evidently servants for the mansion.

The man Murphy stepped quickly forward, and held out his hand to the portly man in black, saying:

"Welcome to Gold Dust, Mr. Morritson!"

"How are you, Murphy?" was the cordial greeting, as they shook hands. "So, this is the place you have been booming, is it?"

"This is the place, sir, and yonder's the house. You will agree with me, sir, that it is a fine building for your purpose, I know. Is it not all that I said of it?"

"It is, it is!" exclaimed the portly gentleman, with enthusiasm. "We made no mistake in trusting this matter entirely to you, Murphy, no mistake at all. Well, introduce me to the mayor, or the leading men of the town, and let me get acquainted."

This Murphy proceeded to do forthwith, presenting the gentleman to Dalton, Godwin, and others.

Meanwhile, the man first to alight had sauntered on to the piazza of the hotel, and had mounted the steps. The piazza was about shoulder high from the ground.

As he was ascending the steps, a young man who was standing there was eyeing him closely. The stranger saw it, but paid no attention to it, and when he reached the piazza he turned and looked, to see the passengers who had come by the special.

He noted that the young man was approaching him, but gave him no attention until a hand was laid on his shoulder.

"You are Tiger Joe," said a voice.

"I guess not," was the cool reply, and the stranger turned calmly and looked at his accuser.

"But, I know that you are, sir!"

"And I assure you that I am not. You have made a mistake."

"You lie; you—"

Even if that was not his name, the stranger instantly displayed some of the striking characteristics of the tiger. With a movement as quick as a flash, he laid hold upon the young man by the collar of his coat and one leg, and jerked him off his feet, and swung him around with apparently as much ease as if the young man had been a puppet of straw.

"Who wants it?" he called out. "Going, going, gone; and the lowest bidder takes the lot!"

CHAPTER II.

A MOOTED QUESTION.

Everybody turned in the direction of the voice.

It looked as if the young man had made a mistake, indeed, as the other had tried to assure him.

In making the charge he had made, his hand had moved to his hip, as if for a gun with which to back up his accusation, but he never drew it.

Before he could even get his fingers upon it, the stranger was performing the action described, and with his last words he swung the young man over the railing and held him there.

"Hello!" exclaimed Handsome Harry, who happened to be one of the nearest. "What's the matter here?"

"This young gentleman made the mistake of calling me a liar, that is all," answered the stranger. "Who wants him? If nobody claims him in ten seconds, I'll drop him with a force that may do him injury."

"Here, I'll take him!" said Handsome Harry, stepping quickly forward.

He put up his arms, and the young man was dropped into them without any show of sparing his feelings.

Handsome Harry did nothing more than break his fall, and stood him up on his feet at once, when instantly the young man swung his hand to his hip, exclaiming:

"Curse you! I'll fix—"

"Better go slow, my young gentleman!"

The stranger of the dark eyes was looking down at him over the tube of a thirty-two.

"See here, Tom, what is the meaning of this, anyhow?" demanded Handsome Harry, catching the young man's pistol hand, and preventing him from drawing. "What has he done?"

"He is Tiger Joe," that's what—"

"Pshaw! you are dreaming, boy. He is no more Tiger Joe than I am."

"So I tried to convince him," said the stranger, "but he would have his own way about it, and wanted to make me agree with him."

"Then let him say who he is," cried the ruffled young gentleman.

He, by the way, was the son of Alf Godwin, of whom casual mention has been made, and was used to having his own way in and about Gold Dust.

"My name is Finnegan, usually called Trump Finnegan by those who know me well," the stranger volunteered. "I'm American born, though my father and mother were Irishmen—"

A laugh interrupted him.

"Yure father and mother were Irishmen?" demanded Felix Shea. "Dhe both av dhem Irishmen?"

"My mother was the better man of the two, anyhow," declared Finnegan. "And," he added, in the same connection, "I take after my mother. As I was going to say, I allow no man to call me a liar to my head when I have the use of my two good arms."

"Well, if you are not Tiger Joe, you look enough like him to be his twin

brother, anyhow," growled young Godwin.

"There, if you had put it that way in the first place, young man, we would have come to an understanding without any unpleasantness, no doubt. I'm sorry if I hurt your feelings, but I couldn't stand that, you know; my Irish was up in an instant."

"Hang you and your Irish!" cried young Godwin, as he walked away.

"Bedad! put it dhere!" cried Felix Shea, who had run up the steps, offering his hand to the stranger. "Oi am Irish mesel', and it is proud av ye Oi am, so Oi am!"

Finnegan accepted the proffered hand, and they shook hands heartily.

"Who was the young fellow?" Finnegan asked.

Handsome Harry spoke up and told him. And he added:

"It will pay you to look out for him, for you have given his pride a worse take-down than it has ever had before, I imagine, and he won't forget it. He is not a bad fellow, but, his father being mayor of the camp, you see he is afflicted with the big-head to a large degree."

"I see. And who is this Tiger Joe he mentioned?"

"Never heard of him?"

"No."

"He's one of the cleverest all-around rascals that ever operated in this part of the country. A sort of gentleman cut-throat, you might say. Has cleaned out two or three banks, and is wanted for murder in two or three places. Altogether, an undesirable chap to fall in with. No compliment to you that you were taken for him, I assure you."

"Well, I should say not. Not very safe to resemble such a character as that. I'll have to hold myself ready to prove up any time at a minute's notice, I guess."

"Yes, if you look as much like him as that."

"Then you don't know him?"

"No."

"Nor you, Irishman?"

"Divil a wanst, sor."

"Well, it would be worth while to know where Mr. Godwin made so worthy an acquaintance."

Handsome Harry looked keenly at the speaker, and the stranger returned his gaze. Felix Shea at the same time blurted out, with a burst of greatest enthusiasm:

"Begorra! no wan but an Irishman would have thought av dhat, no more he would. It would spake bad fur dhe company dhe young gentleman has been kaping, Oi would say. Sure, and it is mesel' dhat don't belave you are dhe man, Finnegan, and av you want—"

"Hello, here is trouble!" suddenly interrupted Handsome Harry.

They looked where he indicated.

Some ten or a dozen determined-looking men were moving in that direction, with young Godwin in the lead.

With him was his father, the mayor, and the stranger did not need to inquire who he was. They came straight on to the steps of the piazza, and it looked as if there would be a scene.

Only a few minutes had elapsed since the arrival of the stages.

The stages had set down all their passengers, but they were still where they had stopped, and everybody had turned to see what was going on when the stranger was in the act of tossing the young upstart over the railing, and were still looking to see what the outcome would be.

The mayor and his men ascended the piazza and confronted the stranger.

"Who are you?" demanded the mayor. "Trump Finnegan, at your service."

"Can you prove that?"

"What kind of proof do you want?"

"The best that you can produce, and if it is not satisfactory I shall put you in jail."

"Whew! That is a rather warm reception. I take it that you are mayor of the town, and that this chap here is your son. I made his acquaintance a few minutes ago—or, rather, he made mine."

"Your bravado is not going to save you, sir!" said the mayor, severely. "You are either what you claim to be or you are not, and I want to know just who and what you are, and that mighty quick. Now, then, sir, speak up and let's hear what you have to say."

"Your son charges that I am one Tiger Joe."

"Yes, exactly."

"Well, has he any proof to back up what he asserts?"

"As to that, his word is good enough. He has seen you before, and I believe he is not mistaken."

"Then it is merely his word against mine, eh? Well, now, mayor, I'll make a proposition to you: Let him bring proof that I am Tiger Joe, and at the same time I'll try to—"

"Try to get away from us— A very clever proposition, but it won't work with me. If you have not the proof at hand that you are not Tiger Joe, to the lock-up you go, there to remain until we find out just who and what you are. Now, speak up."

"That is what I generally do, Mr. Mayor," was the ice-cold rejoinder. "I am not your son's worthy acquaintance of the name mentioned, and I have not the slightest intention of being entertained in your lock-up. Hence the question is— What are you going to do about it?"

The mayor was fairly livid with rage.

"What am I going to do about it?"

"That's the question, sir."

"I'll mighty soon show you what I'm going to do about it! Men, seize him and fire him into the—"

"Be just a little bit careful how you proceed, gentlemen," warned the ice-cool voice of the accused, and a brace of guns suddenly leaped to the fore. "I make no threats; but, all the same, go slow!"

And they did.

They fell back abashed.

"What do you mean?" cried the mayor, fiercely.

"I mean *business*, sir," was the answer to that. "I say again, go careful."

"You mean to defy me—me, the mayor of this city? By George, sir, I will not only put you in jail, but I will handle you without gloves when I get you there!"

"When you get me there—just so! I made a fair proposition to you, and you would not hear it. I am not the man you charge me with being, and I appeal to your people here to say whether or not I am in the right. If they uphold your decision—"

"What! if they do?"

"I'll go to jail under the people's protection, till you can satisfy yourself that your son has made a blunder. Men of Gold Dust, is that a fair proposition?"

"Begorra, nothing could be fairer, Oi should say," declared Felix Shea, loudly. "Hould yer whist till Oi put it to dhe boys mesel', and see phwat dhey have to say about it. Min of Goold Dust, as many av yez as are in favor av letting dhis gentleman go on his own ray-cog-nay-zance, say so; dhe rest av yez hould yure payce fur ever, begob!"

CHAPTER III.
JOYFUL JIMMIE'S SCHEME.

Felix Shea's proposition evoked a hearty laugh.

And that laugh worked a good deal in Trump Finnegan's favor, for laughing men can hardly be severe.

"Let him go, mayor!" spoke up Handsome Harry. "You all know me, and I am not afraid to vouch for him. Maybe Tom has made a mistake, and it would be rough on the stranger."

The crowd supported that proposition by a shout.

"You can't lose anything by that," assumed Finnegan. "You are a whole town against one man, and if you find, after all that I am the chap you want, it hadn't ought to be much trouble to get me. I certainly have no intention of running away from my accuser."

"What say, boy?" and the mayor turned to his son.

"Do as you please," was the answer, and the young man turned on his heel.

"Well, for the present you may remain at large," announced the mayor to the newcomer. "Don't forget, though, that you are under suspicion."

"Thank you for nothing," rejoined Finnegan, lowering his guns. "You evidently have a live appreciation of the value of good health. When you prove that I am Tiger Joe, I'll walk into your jail without a murmur."

"You'll go in, whether you kick or not."

"Unless you mistake."

The mayor walked away with a sniff of disdain, motioning to the men he had brought with him to retire, and the crowd broke into a cheer—one that did not please the mayor greatly.

Finnegan's weapons had now disappeared as quickly as they had come to light, and he held out his hand to Handsome Harry.

"Much obliged to you," he said.

"For what?" Harry asked.

"Why, for chipping in on my side that time."

"Pshaw! that was nothing. You held the winning hand without any assistance."

"Yis, and it is a trump ye are, fur fair," averred Felix Shea. "An' ye want any hilp at any toime, me and Harry are dhe bhoys to yure call, you bet."

"Thank you!" returned Finnegan. "I won't forget your offer, if I get into a tight place any time while I'm here, and the indications are that I may. By the way, what is going on here; a circus in town?"

"You may rely on us, if you are innocent, as you claim," seconded Harry. "You mean these new arrivals by the extra stage? Why, that is Professor Morritson and his assistants and servants. He is about opening a Keely cure in our town, for the benefit of all in need of that kind of thing."

"Ah! I see. Quite a novelty, for this part of the country, I should say."

"Yes, decidedly."

"And that is the building over there? They are going in on a grand scale, no denying that."

"Yes, that is the building, but they did not erect it for that purpose." And thereupon Handsome Harry proceeded to give the newcomer a sketch of the town's history.

Meantime the Godwins, father and son, had entered the hotel office.

"You are sure that is the man?" the mayor demanded.

"Sure of it? Of course I am! Didn't you notice the way he handled his guns? What other man you ever heard of could handle the poppers like that?"

"Well, that is good evidence, certainly."

"And then his cool nerve. Did you ever see the like? He had you and your gang completely balked."

"I guess I'll have to admit it, Tom."

"And, if that were not enough, add to it the fact that I have seen the fellow, and can solemnly swear he is the gentleman."

"Well, that settles it, then. Not likely that you could be mistaken, I guess. But, we will have to take care of him in some other way. He is too many for us, open."

Prof. Morritson had been busy registering for himself and company, for they were to take their dinner—rather supper—there at the Dalton House.

He now turned to Godwin.

"What is this my man Murphy tells me about our house being haunted?" he demanded.

"Well, that is the story that is around," said Godwin, laughing lightly. "I hope that you are not going to take stock in any such old woman's story as that."

"But, it seems to be a fact."

"Like a good many other facts, my dear professor. Give a dog a bad name, and hang the dog, you know."

"But he tells me that you and your partner have a standing reward of five hundred dollars to any one who will lay the ghost. If there is no ghost, why a reward?"

"Don't you see?"

"I must confess that I don't, sir."

"Why, to lead men to investigate and prove the fallacy of the rumor."

"And by that means redeem the house from the stigma—I see, I see. Not a bad stroke of policy."

"Not believing the report ourselves, there was no use our spoiling a good chance by mentioning it to your man, and so no mention was made of it. You are too long-headed to take stock in any such folderol."

"And that offer of five hundred dollars is still open?"

"Yes, it is still open."

"Then, if we succeed in establishing the fact that there is no ghost in the house, you will place it to our credit?"

"I will."

"Good enough. That will be a big item to offset the rent."

"And it will by that much enhance the value of the property, so we shall come off about even by the transaction."

"Exactly so. It will be to our interest to lay the ghost, and to your interest to have it laid. I haven't the slightest doubt but that we shall be able to prove it a myth."

"Nor I, Professor Morritson."

"I say, mayor."

"Well, what is it, Joyful Jimmie?"

It was that personage, who had been waiting to chip in.

"Is this the perfesser what's goin' to run the snake-annihilatin' establishment?"

"Yes, he is the gentleman, Jimmie."

The professor smiled.

"Well, jist give me a knock-down to him, will ye?" Joyful requested.

"Why, certainly. Professor Morritson, this is Mr. James Joy, better known here as Joyful Jimmie, on account of his fondness for the flowing bowl and his happy disposition when in his cups."

"Ah! indeed," said the professor, taking the bumper's hand. "Perhaps you want to inquire into the merits of our gold cure my man."

"Wull, now, perfesser, you couldn't 'a' hit the bull's-eye closer 'n that if you had tried," said Joyful Jimmie, with a

broad smile. "That is jist what I do want to 'quire about."

"Very well, what do you want to know? If you are tired of being a slave to strong drink, I will give you a written guarantee to rid you of the appetite or refund your money and pay you for your lost time while you are in the sanitarium besides."

"You must have fullest faith in your cure," remarked Mr. Godwin, with a smile.

"We have, sir."

"And ye don't kill the patient?" queried Joyful.

"No, we don't kill the patient," the professor assured. "We guarantee to cure him."

"Wull, now, it would be well nigh a miracle, in my case, perfesser," said the old camp bummer. "I am a genuine old soak, and I opine my veins run likker instead of blood."

"No matter about that, sir; you place yourself under my care, and I guarantee to cure you and put blood in your veins instead of alcohol. I would like to get hold of just such an impossible case as yours, to show the people here just what we can do."

"Is that so?"

"That is so, my friend."

"Wull, now, that is right along the line of what I was goin' to propose to ye."

"What was the proposition you had in mind?"

"Ye see, it is like this: I ain't got no hundred dollars, nor even a hundred cents, fer matter of that, but I thought mebbe we could hit off a bargain. I am well known here as the worst old chronic in Hungry Gulch, and if you can cure me it will be a card worth more'n a hundred dollars five times over."

"I don't know but that you are right."

"I know I am."

"When can you put yourself under treatment, if we accept your proposition?"

"Hold on jist a minnit before we talk about that," urged Joyful. "You are on the winnin' side in the game, accordin' to your own say, and I want to know a little more about it before we begin."

"Very well; what do you want to know?"

"I hear said that you allow a patient to swig and swill to his heart's content before you 'ply the remedy."

"Well, that is about right, my friend. We give our patients to drink just as long as they will drink. When they absolutely refuse it, and will not even smell of it, we pronounce the cure effected."

"That is all I wanted to know," assured Joyful. "I'm ready to begin at oncet, and the sooner the better."

"Very well; come to-morrow mornin'."

Joyful Jimmie hastened out, with a joyous smile on his face, and just around the corner he found Felix Shea.

"Et worked!" he cried, slapping his knee and almost dancing in his delight. "Pay day is ten days off, but to-morrow I am goin' to have jist the biggest old glorification on record, you bet!"

CHAPTER IV.

PLANNING A PRETTY PROGRAMME.

Prof. Morritson, after learning the story of the house, that it was haunted, decided not to open until the following morning.

He would allow his assistants and the others to spend the night at the hotel, and would take daylight for their first invasion of the haunted domains. He believed that would be the better plan.

By that means his people would have

all day wherein to become acquainted with the premises, and by night, if they chanced to hear about the ghost, they would probably be in better nerve for the ordeal. Familiarity, he reasoned, would breed contempt.

So that plan he adopted.

Now, the leading resort of an evening at Gold Dust was the Silver Saloon.

This was owned by Seth Dalton, too, and it mattered little to him whether you patronized the hotel or the saloon, he got your money just the same; and if you patronized both, so much the better.

The saloon was a popular gaming establishment, and gaming, be it known, was legalized in that section of country. It was richly furnished and appointed, having the latest and best of everything, and it aimed to be first-class, whether it was or not.

The place was well filled when "Trump" Finnegan sauntered in, in company with Felix Shea.

Felix had taken a strong liking to Finnegan.

This was probably owing to the fact of his prowess, as it had been displayed, and the fact that he laid claim to being an Irishman.

Handsome Harry was there, and, as seats happened to be vacant near him, Finnegan and Shea crossed over to where he sat and took the unoccupied places, with a word of greeting.

They entered into conversation, watching the game at the nearest of the tables with passing interest.

While they sat there, a man sauntered down the room past them, and on to the end and up the other side and out again. He was a thickset fellow, with a red face and redder mustache.

They gave him no attention.

Outside, a man was waiting for this fellow, and that man was the mayor of the camp.

"Well, did you get a good look at him?" he asked.

"Yes, good as I could," was the answer. "I would know him again all right."

"It is not a question of whether you would know him again or not, but do you know him this time?"

"Well, then, I don't."

"All right; you come with me, and we'll talk the matter over a little. I have got a scheme on hand that will pay you well, if you perform well the work laid out for you."

"I have done jobs for you before, mayor."

"That is just the reason that I have selected you for the present undertaking. Come on."

They crossed the street to a building in which the mayor had his office, and there Godwin let himself in with a key.

A faint light was seen coming from a private room at the rear, and he led his companion in that direction, and threw open another door, and ushered him in.

Here were Godwin the younger and Seth Dalton.

"Found him, did you?" queried Dalton. "How are you, Jasper?"

"So's to be and about, thank 'e," the man responded. "How goes it with you?"

"Good enough. Sit down, for we want to talk with you."

"All right," dropping onto a chair. "Go ahead. You in it, too, Tom?" to Godwin's son.

"Yes, up to my neck."

"Now, the matter is right here," began Godwin, having seated himself. "You said you did not know that fellow."

"Never seen him before in my born days, mayor, that's sartain."

"Well, then, we are going to put you on to him. We happen to know who he is."

"Who is he?"

"Tiger Joe."

The man leaped to his feet with astonishment.

"Ye don't mean it!" he cried. "Who says he is Tiger Joe? How do ye know he is?"

"I say he is," spoke up Tom Godwin. "You? Where did you ever see Tiger Joe?"

"At Carson City when the sheriff's men had him there, before he shot Deputy Williams and got away."

"The old mischief, you say!"

"Fact."

"Now, you see what is required of you," said Godwin the elder. "You must arrest him and lodge him in the jail."

"That trick may be a good deal easier said than done, old man."

"If any man in Hungry Gulch can do it, you are the man. And we'll be on hand to back you up."

"But, is it dead sure that he is the chap?" to Tom Godwin.

"Of course it is dead sure," was the answer, in petulance. "Don't you suppose I know what I am talking about?"

"Yes, but the proof of it. Suppose he claims he ain't—"

"There, now you have come to the vital point," interrupted the mayor. "Do you think that a thousand dollars right down in hand would help you to remember him as Tiger Joe?"

"Oh-ho! Now I nibble. Now I bite, as it were. That man Tiger Joe? Why, bless yer heart, mayor, I kin swear to him as high as a mountain, if you want it that high. Wasn't I one of the deputies that he got away from at Carson? Didn't I see him kill Williams—"

"Hold on, don't get in too deep!" cautioned the mayor. "You were a deputy at Carson City at the time, that is enough. Here is the thousand dollars to fasten that point in your mind. Now, have you got the sand to go and arrest him and jam him into our jug here?"

The mayor had tickled the fellow's vanity a moment before, by the compliment paid him.

"Have I got the sand for it? Do I look like a rooster that wouldn't come to the scratch for a thousand dollars? Try me."

"Then you see what is required of you?"

"I reckon I do. You want me to go and scoop this chap, and swear that I know him personally fer Tiger Joe."

"That is it, exactly. You have not heard that we tried to arrest him this afternoon, then?"

"No; did ye?"

"Yes. There was only one thing lacking, and that was, proof. My son here made the charge; but there was no proof to back it up, and so we had to let him off."

"I see."

"Now, it is not to be known that you have seen us, or heard anything about this matter. You have just come in from Red Horse; you saunter into the Silver Saloon, as is your custom, and there you see Tiger Joe, and you go for him without a second's hesitation."

"I see, I see."

"My son will be there, and so will I and Dalton here, and the minute you make the charge we will be on hand to aid you in taking him. If you need any aid, which is not at all likely."

"All right, count on me. But, what is

the game? Is it dead straight that he is Tiger Joe?"

"For the present, yes, he is. What we want is to get him away from here, and if it is found out later that a mistake has been made, he can be set free and no harm done."

"I see. But there ain't no mistake; he is the man, and I kin swear to it."

"Good enough; you understand all right. Now, give us about ten minutes to go there and get settled down, and then you can come in and open up the ball. Be sure to have your gun out, for this fellow is lightning on the draw. Pocket your wad, now, and be off."

CHAPTER V.

A HITCH IN THE PROCEEDINGS.

"Trump" Finnegan and his two companions were enjoying some light drink and cigars, and were talking pleasantly among themselves, when the thickset fellow with the red face and redder mustache sauntered down that way again.

This time he stopped near where they sat, and looked on at the game that was in progress near at hand.

"Who is that fellow?" inquired Trump.

"Dhat?" responded Felix. "Dhat is Jasper Lord, a deputy from over to Red Horse."

"A deputy what?"

"Deputy sheriff," explained Handsome Harry. "You are not afraid of his kind, are you? But, that's only in jest."

"With the unmeant insinuation that I may be Tiger Joe after all. But, I attach no significance to your remark, and take it as it was meant. No, I'm not afraid of anybody."

Just at that moment the deputy turned in their direction, and, seeing Handsome Harry, apparently for the first time, he advanced, saying:

"Hello, Sport Harry; how is it you are not playing this evening?"

"Oh, I thought I would take an evening off—"

"Tiger Joe, by all that's golden!"

So the deputy suddenly interrupted, and he had whipped out a gun at the first word and covered his man.

Handsome Harry and Felix Shea started and stared at their companion, who sat unmoved. He was as cool as a Roman punch, and was looking the deputy in the eye.

The deputy had spoken in a loud tone, and the attention of half the people in the room was drawn immediately.

"You are slightly mistaken, my friend," asserted the accused.

"Mistaken? Well, I ruther guess not, my fine feller; I ruther guess not!"

"Then how much are you paid for making this charge?"

"Paid fur makin' the charge? Do you want me to bore ye right where you set this minnit? You are worth half as much dead as you are alive, and for a cent I'd do it!"

"And be hanged for murder; that would pay you big, now, wouldn't it? I am not offering the slightest resistance."

"And you'd better not, either, by golden!"

His loud tones had now drawn the attention of everybody, and the voice of Mayor Godwin was heard.

"Hello! What is the meaning of this?"

"It means that I have just lighted on to Tiger Joe, that killed Deputy Williams," cried Lord.

"Tiger Joe?"

"Yes, Tiger Joe."

"Then you know him, deputy?"

"Well, ruther, I do! I have had my eye open fer him."

"What did I say?" chipped in Godwin, the younger, crowding his way to the front. "Here, now, is proof."

Handsome Harry and Felix Shea had been rendered speechless for the moment by what seemed to be irrefutable proof that their companion was indeed Tiger Joe, as charged.

"Perhaps my son's word will be worth something to you now, men of Gold Dust," reprimanded the mayor, severely. "Here the man is recognized again as Tiger Joe, and this time by a deputy sheriff, who certainly can't be mistaken."

They had the drop on Finnegan in the worst way, the mayor himself having pulled a gun.

"A clever game, on my word," said the prisoner, coolly.

"What do you mean?" roared the mayor. "Would you make the insinuation that—"

"No insinuation about it, sir; I say it right out flat; I say it is a clever game, for you must think me blind not to see through it."

"What d'ye mean?" demanded the deputy.

"Just what I say."

"And what d'ye mean to say?"

"That is the question, what do you mean to say?"

Both guns were aimed straight at the man's heart, but still he was as cool as a cucumber.

"Well, what I mean to say is just this," Trump declared. "Knowing that I am not Tiger Joe, it is plain to me, if to nobody else, that you are a manufactured second, my man."

He spoke to the deputy.

"Well, cuss your impudence!" that worthy cried. "I have a notion to bore ye fer luck. Here I have jist come over from Red Horse, ain't hardly said ten words to nobody, and hadn't the least idee of seein' you here till I sot eyes on ye. What does he mean, mayor, anyhow?"

"He means to try another bluff, that is what, but it will not work this time. We have got the dead wood on him too hard."

"He can bet his life we have," said the son.

"Well, what are you going to do about it?" asked the prisoner.

"What are we goin' to do about it? I reckon we'll show ye that," the deputy declared.

"Well, that is what I want to know, so as to be prepared for the worst. If you mean to run me up to a limb, I suppose you will give me time—"

"A limb nothin'!"

"What then?"

"You go in the cooler, that is where you go; then I'll take ye to Carson and reap the reward that is on yer head. You don't give me the slip like you did the boys before."

It was convincing; the sympathy of the crowd was with the fellow.

Finnegan was looked upon with scowling brows, and more than one hand in that crowd was on a gun.

"You have got the drop on me, there is no use my trying to get out of that," the prisoner spoke, calmly. "I'm not fool enough to invite a bullet when there is sure death in it."

"That's hoss sense, anyhow," averred the deputy.

"There is only one thing I ask."

"What is that?"

"The word of the mayor, here, in the presence of the people of Gold Dust, taking them to be white men in the main, that I will have a fair show for

my life. If I surrender, am I to have the protection of this camp and a fair hearing to-morrow?"

"If you surrender?" sneered the deputy. "What else can you do, I would like to know?"

"That does not answer my question."

"You will be lodged in the jail and kept there until the authorities at Carson can come and get you," asserted the mayor. "You will be protected all right; don't worry about that. We'll put you where the dogs won't bite you."

"This is all one-sided, though."

"What do you mean?"

"You do not mean that I am to have a hearing, and a chance to defend myself and prove that I am not Tiger Joe, evidently."

"That will come later. When the Carson people get hold of you they will give you all the trial you want, I guess; you needn't allow a little thing like that to disturb you."

"That's what's the matter!" cried the deputy. "That reward is mine, my chappie!"

"Then you refuse a hearing?"

"Yes, till the Carson people get here, we do," vaunted the mayor.

"Very well; now, hear what I have got to say about it: I am not Tiger Joe, and I refuse to submit to this arrest."

"Oh-ho! What are you going to do about it?"

"Resist."

There he sat, sipping his drink, the coolest man of them all, apparently.

"Why, you dosh blank fool!" howled the deputy. "We have got the drop on ye in the hardest kind of way, and you ain't got a ghost of a show."

"Look here, Jasper," cut in Handsome Harry, "are you right down sure that you are not making a mistake? The man is positive in declaring that he is not Tiger Joe, and he ought to have a hearing."

"Let him have it, right here and now, then," cried the deputy. "Let him prove that he ain't Tiger Joe, and we'll own the corn. I was a deputy at Carson the time we had him there, and I guess I had ought to know him. Let him prove up, if he can."

"That is the ticket!" cried the crowd. "Give every man a fair show, is our motter!"

CHAPTER VI.

THE TABLES TWICE TURNED.

A big crowd had now encircled the table.

The accused man was still sipping his wine, and Handsome Harry and Felix Shea were still seated with him.

Having taken sides with him, and having expressed their friendship for him and invited him to call on them if he needed help, they were bound to him in honor.

At the same time, it was plain that even they now doubted him, for the proof was too self-evident for any one to doubt; while the charge the accused had made savored of absurdity. It did not stand to reason that the mayor would charge him falsely.

Tom Godwin and Seth Dalton had moved close by this time, and were ready to lay hands on the prisoner at the word.

Handsome Harry and the Irishman exchanged a glance, and stood up.

Finnegan sat still.

"Come, what are you going to do about it?" demanded the mayor, with a show of impatience.

"I suppose you will allow me to stand

up and show myself, and not put a bullet into me for it?" the accused suggested.

"Yes, you kin stand up," said the deputy, "but take awful good care that your hands don't move to'rds a gun. Ef they do, you are a goner that same instant."

"All right; that is understood."

With that, the stranger put down his glass, and deliberately stood up in his chair, in plain sight of everybody.

"Perhaps some of you remember what I said this afternoon, gentlemen," he remarked, in full, clear voice. "I said that when you could prove that I am Tiger Joe, I would walk into your jail without a murmur. Do you remember that?"

"Yes; and do you recall what I said?" demanded the mayor.

"I said that you would go in, whether you made a kick or not."

"Yes, so you did; and I observed at the time something about the possibility of your being mistaken."

"It doesn't look much like it."

"That's what et don't, by golden!" cried the deputy.

They still had their guns covering the accused man's breast, and held the better hand.

"We are not always to judge by appearances," said the prisoner. "I suppose this crowd is open to honest conviction, if I produce good proof that I am not Tiger Joe?"

"Dhat same is all dhe bhoys want," assured Felix Shea.

"And I have full confidence that he can produce it," declared Handsome Harry. "Make it a fair deal, men of Gold Dust."

"That's what we will!"

"You bet!"

"That is all the assurance I want, gentlemen," said the accused. "I suppose you will allow me to produce a paper from my pocket, deputy?"

"I reckon so, but don't be all night about it. I know you are Tiger Joe, and it is all blame foolishness letting you try to make other folks think that you ain't."

"This would be a queer world if your ideas of justice prevailed," remarked the accused, as he produced a paper from his pocket and opened it. "I have here a description of this Tiger Joe, gentlemen, which I will read aloud for your benefit."

The Godwins exchanged quick glances.

Here was something they had not counted on, evidently. Even the deputy was disconcerted.

Without delay the accused read the description of Tiger Joe, as he was popularly known, and any one at all able to comprehend a word picture could see that it did not apply to him.

"There you have it," he said, in conclusion. "The man wanted is two inches under my height, weighs thirty pounds less, and has steel-gray eyes, while my own are nearly black. He has light complexion, and is of nervous temperament. Has a restless way of moving his hands when excited."

"Et's a darn fake!" cried the deputy. "That don't fit you at all, and I swear that you are Tiger Joe!"

"No, it does not fit me, you are right; and yet it is the published description of Tiger Joe, as sent out by the authorities. I put one in my pocket, thinking I might run across him some time."

"More likely that you had it printed yourself as a means of fooling people soft enough to be taken in by it," rejoined the mayor. "How is it that these notices have never appeared at Gold Dust? Your story is of too thin fabric, my fine fellow."

"Then you refuse to accept the proof?"

"We do, positively."

"Which is proof in itself that you do not mean to give me a fair chance. I appeal to your citizens."

"It is proof that we do not mean to be humbugged," roared the mayor. "Here are two men, well known to us, who positively identify you, and we would be a set of fools not to take their word against yours."

"Very good; but if you will take the trouble to look, you will find that this paper is genuine, and bears the seal of the Secret Service."

Godwin was now nervous, the deputy was paling, and young Godwin was edging away from the immediate scene of action.

"The Secret Service?" said Handsome Harry.

"Exactly."

"What have you to do with the Secret Service?"

"I have not laid claim to having anything to do with it," was the return. "This paper, however, is the genuine article."

"That is a lie!" cried the mayor. "I do not believe that any such paper has ever been issued, or I would have received copies of it, as mayor of this town."

"The queer thing about it is that you did not," said the accused, calmly. "It is passing strange that they are not publicly posted here, as in nearly every other camp of any importance in the country round. As to my being a liar, I resent it again."

With a movement to rival the lightning, the accused man flung his hat and struck the mayor a stinging blow in the face with it.

And, with another motion, almost simultaneous, he gave the deputy's pistol hand a sharp kick. Away flew his weapon, and all in the same motion the accused had them covered. He had turned the tables upon them in the neatest kind of manner.

"Since you have opened the ball and forced the issue," he cried, "we may as well see the thing out. I am not Tiger Joe, but there is a man not more than a thousand miles from this table who answers right well the description contained in this circular. Hold on there, my young gentleman!"

He turned one of his weapons upon Tom Godwin.

The mayor's son came to a stop, and turned the hue of death as he faced around.

"Men of Gold Dust," said the new master of the situation, "I leave it to you to say whether the description you have heard fits this chap or not."

"What! You accuse my son of being a thief and murderer!" screamed the mayor, turning livid. "Citizens of Gold Dust, are you going to allow a cutthroat to come here and run things this way?"

The strain was now intense.

It was impossible to foresee what the next minute would bring forth.

"I merely want the crowd to fit the description where it belongs, sir, that is all," said the stranger.

Handsome Harry and Felix Shea were looking at him in amazement. It was now plain to Harry that the man was something more than he had at first laid claim to being.

Men were crowded close around the table, and while Finnegan had his back to the nearest wall, yet the table was some distance from that wall, and was entirely surrounded. It was a state of things that could not long endure, and there was breathless suspense.

No man made bold to speak in response to the cool stranger's demand, and in the moment while he paused for response something happened. The table on which he stood rose in air on one side—he had stepped from chair to table, and he lost his balance and came to the floor with a crash; and in the same moment the deputy and the mayor pounced upon him.

"Lend a hand here!" cried the mayor. "We have got the rascal now, and he shall pay dearly for the charge he has made."

CHAPTER VII.

AN OFFER OF FRIENDLY OFFICE.

The suspense was broken.

Loud voices were heard on every side, and it was plain that the house was divided.

Not equally divided, perhaps, but there were some who were demanding that the stranger should have a fair chance, and among them were Handsome Harry and Felix Shea.

Nor were they merely demanding; they were taking an active part in the scrimmage, as well.

"Fair play, here, mayor!" cried Handsome Harry.

"Dhat's phwat's phwat!" echoed Felix.

They had laid hold upon the mayor and pulled him off, and proceeded to reach for the deputy to serve him the same, but their help was not needed.

With a quick turn Finnegan had him right, and he rose with him and lurled him a dozen feet away from the crowd. But it did not stop at that, for the mayor had other backers at hand.

"Stand back, ye omadhoun!" cried Felix, giving the mayor a shove as he tried to reach the accused man again. "Sure, ye are not dhe square man dhat Oi thot ye were, no more ye are! Stand back, Oi say; or by dhe grane glint av Kerry av Oi don't do ye harrum!"

Trump Finnegan, the while, was contending against those who were setting at him, and, finding that they were disposed to show him no quarter, Handsome Harry chipped in with him.

For a few minutes there was a lively scrimmage, and considerable damage done, for the stranger's fists shot out with the force of sledges.

As soon as his prowess was fully known, there was a truce.

"A fair show is all he asks," cried Handsome Harry.

"And that he is bound to have, or know the reason," said Finnegan. "I am ready, gentlemen."

"I order that cutthroat arrested!" thundered the mayor. "Are you all cowards, that you are afraid of one man? Go for him and tie him, hands and feet!"

"Maybe you had better try it yourself," said one man, who had a mashed nose and one eye almost bursting from its socket. "I have had all I want, thank 'e, and I guess there is more the same."

But the end was not yet.

Seth Dalton had not been idle throughout.

Seeing the drift things were taking he had prepared a new move.

He had passed the word among a number of men to be depended on, and at a signal they made a rush.

"Look out there!" exclaimed Handsome Harry.

"I am looking," said Trump.

At that instant the report of a pistol rang out.

Trump Finnegan was seen to start, as if the bullet had come close to his head.

Such had been the case. The shot

had been fired from the extreme rear of the room, if indeed in the room at all, and the bullet had come within an ace of its billet.

There was no time for question or comment; the men rushing forward in answer to Dalton's signal were at hand, and there was going to be another hand-to-hand contest. It looked as if the stranger might now get the worst of it.

At the moment of impact the room was plunged in darkness.

The place enjoyed the distinction of being lighted with gas from a supply tank in the rear.

Some one, clearly, had closed the cut-off, and, with hardly a flicker, every light was gone, and no man could see who his neighbor was. There was first a growl, and then curses.

Trump Finnegan made a dodge, and escaped the men who had been about to lay their hands on him when the lights vanished.

With the advantage of the darkness, he made his way in the direction of the rear.

He had had a close call—more than one—during the last few minutes.

Moving about the same as the others were moving, showing no haste that might arouse suspicion, he presently reached a rear window, and vaulted lightly out.

Landing all right, he started around the side toward the front, but had not gone a quarter of the distance when he came upon two men who were standing there in the shadow in conversation.

He had barely time to stop without discovery.

The noise within the saloon had prevented his steps from being overheard.

It was quite dark just there, and he had only been able to make out the outlines of the two men against the faint light of the street.

Behind him there was no light that could reveal his presence in the same manner, and he stopped short at once and leaned against the building without taking another step or making a sound.

"Did I hit him?" one voice asked.

"Don't think you did; but the light went out so quick that a fellow couldn't tell."

"I hope I did, anyhow, curse him."

"There is no doubting that you were right, I guess."

"Doubting it! Haven't you seen enough to satisfy you on that point, yet?"

"Yes, I am satisfied."

"We have got to do him up, and that this night, or he will do for us all the worst way. There is no time for monkeying about it. Wonder if they have got him!"

"Ten to one they haven't."

At that moment another actor appeared upon the scene.

He came out of the shadows as if he had been a part of them—as, of course, he had up to that moment.

"Don't you move, either one," he ordered, in tones not to be doubted.

"Who are you?" one demanded.

"I have got a couple of guns bearing upon your vitals; let that be the first essential thing for you to know," was the rejoinder.

"Then you are the devil—"

"If you mean the one you just tried to capture, no. And I want to give you warning to leave him alone or you will have to deal with Tiger Joe the real."

"Who in blazes are you?"

"I'm Tiger Joe."

Exclamations of amazement escaped from both men.

Trump Finnegan was a listener to this,

of course, and was as much surprised as they.

"Now, hold up your hands while you count twenty," the unknown added, "and if you move out of your tracks before you finish the number you'll drop in them, that's all."

With that he stepped back, and vanished as he had come.

For a few moments the men were silent.

Trump Finnegan left his place silently and moved off in the direction the unknown had taken.

He had gone but a little distance when a hand grabbed his arm and a voice said in his ear, in hasty manner:

"The night has only death for you. You are known, and the sooner you get out of the way of these wolves the better for your health. Come, and I will show you a place."

"I am not in the habit of running away from danger," said Trump.

"Don't be a fool!"

"I try not to be. Who are you?"

"One who would be your friend, if you will have it so."

"I never refuse a worthy friendship. You speak as if you knew who I am."

"Yes, I do know you."

"Who am I, then?"

"You are Deadwood Dick, Junior."

"Well, now, that is a wide departure from the first charge that was made, certainly."

"And a good deal nearer the truth. Come, will you allow me to show you a secure place of hiding? If not, you will likely regret it later on."

"You think so?"

"I know it."

"Where would you take me?"

"Into the haunted mansion—I know a way of getting in."

"And try a round with the ghosts? I had rather face the dangers that I know all about than those I wot not of, my good friend."

"Very well, if your choice is made, so be it. I can be of no further help to you. See, they are lighting the saloon up again; you will be missed, and the whole camp will soon be buzzing about your ears."

CHAPTER VIII.

CONFIDENCE MISPLACED.

The man was about drawing away, as he finished speaking, but Trump laid a detaining hand upon his arm.

At the same moment a bar of light shot out in that direction from one of the side windows of the saloon, and their faces were revealed to each other.

Trump Finnegan found in the man a rather good-looking fellow of about his own age, and clad in similar rough garb. He had dark eyes, hair and mustache; in fact, the two looked something alike.

At the first sight, as the bar of light shot out upon them, he had taken it to be Handsome Harry.

The next moment proved that it was not he.

Not more than a second elapsed, seemingly, while they stood there, but it was long enough for discovery.

There was a flash and a sharp report, and a bullet whizzed between them so unpleasantly near that it caused them both to dodge, and Finnegan whipped out a gun.

In almost the same moment he sent a bullet speeding to the spot where the flash had been seen.

Together the two men sprang out of the path of the light.

"Say quick—will you come?" demanded the unknown.

"Why not fight it out?"

"There is no use throwing your life away for nothing. You are only one against the whole camp."

"I have you to back me."

"Not unless you come with me, and instantly. I have something to live for, if you have not. They know you, I tell you, and your doom is sealed unless you are guided by me."

"Then there are Handsome Harry and the Irish—"

"Hyar they be! Death to Tiger Joe an' all what stands fer him! Let drive at 'em, boys!"

One flash and report, then another, then several in a desultory sort of fashion and the bullets went whistling through the air in a dangerous manner, some of them too close for comfort.

"What did I tell you?" demanded the unknown. "Follow me if you will; stay if you are determined."

With that he was off in the darkness.

There was no time given for consideration; in a second he would be out of sight in the gloom.

Trump followed him, keeping close at his heels, not alone for safety, but with a double object in mind. The mention of the haunted house was a part of the consideration.

It was plain, now, that Dalton and the Godwins ruled things at Gold Dust.

The unknown had not magnified the danger.

Shots were still being fired, and men were running this way and that to make at least a show of doing something.

In another minute the shooting became meaningless; everybody who had a gun making use of it to add to the general din, for camp denizens enjoy "shooting up" the town on occasion.

Out in the direction of the haunted house they ran and there all was silence.

The unknown slackened his pace.

"You are there?" he asked in guarded tone.

"Yes, I thought I had better accept your offer, friend."

"The most sensible thing for you to do. Now, follow me and make no noise."

He advanced at a walk, and the other followed him. If it was Deadwood Dick, as the unknown had said, this was the sort of adventure he enjoyed.

They now came to the great, frowning house, forbidding enough in its appearance without the additional reputation of being haunted as well, and the unknown led the way around it to the right.

There was a hard, flag walk, and their most careful stepping gave out some sound.

"Stop," said the unknown.

The other stopped to avoid a collision with him.

"When I open this secret door," said the unknown, "you step right in and I will follow and close the door after us. There is only room for one at a time, and you would not know how to secure the door."

"All right, if that is the programme."

There was then a click, a rasping sound, and a darker gap showed in the dark wall.

Their eyes had become slightly used to the gloom by this time, or Finnegan's, at any rate, and he was enabled to make out this much.

"Now, then," said the unknown.

"Is it level footing?" asked Finnegan.

"Yes, perfectly level; you can't miss it, pard."

Trump Finnegan stepped forward, never thinking of treachery, and was about to step through the opening, when he

received a push from behind that sent him headlong into the place of Stygian darkness.

He realized the same instant that he had been cleverly duped and trapped, but of what avail then?

He felt himself going down and down. What fate awaited him?

He did not cry out—it had come too suddenly, and what would have been the use, anyhow?

Down, and down, and then something touched him, caught under his arm, and the thought came like lightning that it was a rope and he must clutch it for his life.

With the idea came the action, and he closed his arm upon the rope, and, in almost the same moment, grasped it with his hands. It yielded under his weight, or it might have been impossible for him to hold it, and from somewhere came the muffled clang of a bell.

There he swung, he knew not where, and far down below he heard something strike upon the rock with a heavy thud, strike again, and then all was still.

A moment more, and a rasping sound and a click told him that the door had been closed.

Where was he? What dangers surrounded him?

Deadwood Dick (for it was he) felt that he had had the escape of his lifetime.

And who was the scoundrel who had thus lured him to such a doom, under the guise of doing him a friendly turn?

Once let him escape, once let him meet the fellow face to face, and there would be a day of reckoning. But, was that day ever likely to come? Alas! he feared it was not.

"Well, Richard, or Finnegan, or whatever your name may be," he said to himself, having collected his grit, "you are in a deuce of a fix this time, sure enough. No matter what your name was when you came here, it is likely to be Dennis before you get out."

He had wound one leg around the rope, and was swaying with it, to and fro.

That it was the rope that had rung the bell he knew.

He gathered his strength, while he hung there, and at the same time was trying to decide whether to slide down or climb up.

One thing he did not want to do, he did not want to ring the bell again if he could help it. That would apprise his enemies that he had caught fast to the rope and that he was still alive.

He could go down with less disturbance to the rope than up.

It might not matter even if he did ring the bell again, his fate might be assured, all the same; but, there was a chance for him.

While there is life there is hope, was one of his mottoes, and he had considerable of both still left in his locker. So, with care, he let himself down, and down, feeling for the end.

The rope swayed, but the bell did not give forth another warning note, and presently Dick discovered that the lower end of it was secured to something and that it was drawing him to one side of the dark hole as he descended, and that its swaying was lessened.

A little further, and he found support for his feet on what seemed to be a shelf of rock.

He did not let go of the rope, but held fast to it while he rested and recovered his breath preparatory to further investigation, and while he stood thus he offered a devout thanksgiving for his miraculous preservation.

CHAPTER IX.

JOYFUL JIMMIE ON HAND.

"Phwat dhe ould mischief has become av him, shport?"

"That is impossible to say," Handsome Harry responded to the eager query.

"Can it be possible dhat he was Tiger Joe, afther all, and dhat Tom and dhe deputy were roight?"

"It is possible, but hard to believe."

"Thot's so, allanna."

It was the next morning, as fair and bright a day as had ever broken over Hungry Gulch.

Handsome Harry and Felix Shea were on the piazza of the Dalton House. All their inquiries for their friend Finnegan had brought them nothing.

They had ascertained that he had not spent the night in the room he had spoken for in the hotel, and they were at loss to account for his whereabouts, save in two ways.

One of these we have mention of above.

"There is only one other thing to conclude, Felix," said the sport.

"And phwat is thot?" the young Irishman inquired. "Sure, anything is betther nor dhat."

"It is that his enemies got the best of him, in that scrimmage in the dark, and made away with him. If that is right, we may as well go into mourning for him."

"Ochone! Dhat would be too bad, too bad, so it would, so it would. Oi had rather dhat he moight be Tiger Joe, on me wurrud, fur dhen he would stand a chance to become a daycint man; dhe which same a dead man can't, ye see. But, by dhe powers he was a daycint man as he was!"

"I agree with you, Felix."

Just then the Godwins, father and son, came out of the house.

"What is this I hear?" demanded the mayor. "It seems that your new acquaintance is not to be found this morning, Handsome Harry."

"That appears to be the situation, mayor," the sport agreed.

"A sign that he has cleared out, I take it. Has taken himself off between two days, as it were. What more proof do you want that he was Tiger Joe, as my son said?"

"Well, there is not much ground for me to defend him on, mayor, that is the fact."

"Ha! ha! No, I should say not."

"I don't see how you could doubt my word, Harry," said Tom Godwin.

"Well, you see, it was like this; the fellow didn't look the cutthroat we know Tiger Joe to be."

"Looks don't always count, sport," said the mayor. "You see how he tried to fit that description to my son here; why, it was an absurdity!"

"Felix and I were just talking about him," said Handsome Harry. "We admit the suspicious look about the affair as it stands, and can think of only one other way of explaining it."

"How's that?"

"That your men got the best of him and quietly put him out of the way last night—"

"Great Scott!" cried the mayor, interrupting. "You had better have a care, sport. Do you think that I would permit such a thing as that to be done here in Gold Dust?"

"Might it not have been done without your knowledge?"

"Possibly, but I don't believe it. No, no; you want to get that out of your mind at once."

"Well, it was only a thought that

came to me, that is all. The man is missing, and the great question is, what has become of him?"

"We will look to Jasper Lord to tell us that."

"He is still after him?"

"Yes; he set out bright and early to scour all the trails."

The mayor and his worthy son passed on and entered the mayor's office on the other side of the street, and as they disappeared Felix Shea shook his head.

"What is the matter?" asked Harry.

"A bad lot, dhe pair av thim," declared the young Irishman.

"I am inclined to agree with you, my boy," coincided the sport; "but at the same time it does not do to speak what we think at all times."

While they were still talking Prof. Morritson made his appearance, looking refreshed after his night's rest. His man Murphy was with him.

"A lively town you have here, I take it," the professor remarked to Handsome Harry.

"Well, sometimes, yes," said the sport.

"You seemed to have had a lively time last night, judging from the shooting that was going on."

"Well, yes, there was a little excitement on foot last evening; but then that does not happen every night, you must understand."

"No, no, I suppose not, suppose not. But, about the house we have rented here—can you tell me anything about that, my friend?"

"What about it?"

"They say it is haunted."

"Well, yes, that is the story, I believe."

"Do you know anything about it?"

"Not a great deal. I have heard a good many tales concerning it."

"Well, I am not a believer in ghosts by any means, but, really, there is something amiss there."

"You think so?"

"There must be. In the first place, everybody here says so, as I am convinced by inquiry, and then I heard and saw things myself, last night, that rather baffle me."

"So?"

"Yes, decidedly. Did you hear that ghostly bell that sounded about the time the shooting was going on?"

"Yes, I heard that, and it is said to come from that house. That is one of the things that no one has been able to explain. There is no bell in the house."

"There must be."

"So we all say, but where is it?"

The professor simply shrugged his shoulders at that.

"And then I saw lights moving hither and thither about midnight—I confess that I was watching for the ghosts at that hour."

"Yes, that is another feature of the place, sir. Do you think you will stick to your bargain and open for business in that house? Or will you back out and leave it in possession of the spooks?"

"It is my intention, young man, to lay that ghost, and I would like to engage a fellow of about your appearance to aid me in doing it."

The man spoke with determination.

"Begorra, can't ye take dhe pair av us?" put in Felix.

"Yes, the pair of you, if you are partners," the professor readily agreed.

"Phwat do ye say, shport?" cried Felix, eagerly. "Sure, av dhe pay is good Oi don't moind taking a whack at it. Phwat do ye say?"

"Why, I am agreeable to anything

that promises excitement or sensation, and if you want to engage I will go with you to see the fun. What is your plan, Mr. Morritson?"

"Why, to have you come there and watch by night. Need not mention to any one, you know, that you are coming."

"All right, we'll be on hand."

"Thank you heartily, sir. As to the pay—"

"As to that, fix it with Felix here; I will take mine out in ghost experience."

"Very well; consider it a bargain."

At that moment Joyful Jimmie came along, with a cheery good-morning.

"Ah! my man, you are on hand early, I see," welcomed the professor. "Well, are you still of the same mind?"

"I am all the more of the same mind, perfesser," averred the bummer.

"I am jist as eager to begin the experymint as you possibly kin be, and the sooner the better."

Joyful had slicked himself up in his best style for the occasion.

"All right, my man; we expect to be ready for you before noon; we'll take dinner in our own house to-day. When you see the windows open and everything looking inviting, walk over and ring the bell."

"All right, perfesser; I'll be thar, sure. But, say, would it be askin' too much for a foretaste of what's to come? Suppose you give me a treat on account, to sorter limber up my throat, as it wur," emphasizing with a slight cough.

CHAPTER X.

ROGUES IN COUNCIL.

When the mayor and his son entered the office they closed the door of the inner room after them.

"Well, there is one great stumbling block out of the way," remarked the mayor with satisfaction.

"Yes, thanks to Armstrong."

"Frank is a clever fellow, Tom, and a good deal of the success of our game is going to depend on him. I hope he and Dalton won't keep us waiting long."

"Not likely that they will."

"Everything seems to be playing into our hands, so far."

"Yes, and only this one thing has turned up to give us uneasiness. We cught to have plain sailing, now."

"Now that he is out of the way."

"That is what I mean."

"Yes, the whole game is ours, now. It was a good thing that we took the precaution to forearm ourselves in that direction. But I thought he would come out on top, hang me if I didn't!"

"We knew what we had to deal with."

"That's true."

"And I guess it is true that you are out a thousand dollars," the son reminded.

"How's that?"

"You have a short memory. I mean the thousand you paid Jasper last night."

"Oh! that? That don't come out of my pocket, my boy; that will have to go to profit and loss, and the concern will have to stand it. Yes, it does look as if the has skipped with it."

"Of course he has skipped. Rascal enough to come into our game, he was rascal enough to beat us at it if he could, and it is not likely that we shall ever see his face here again. That does not matter, and perhaps so much the better; he knows but little."

"And that not enough to do us any harm or him any good."

They talked on in this vein, until Seth Dalton came in.

"Waiting for me?" he inquired.

"Yes, and had begun to think you were not coming."

"Couldn't get away just at the minute, and thought it better to drop in just casually."

"Well, it is all right. Haven't seen anything of Tiger Joe this morning, I suppose?"

"Say, where can he be?"

"That is just what we want to tell you."

"Ah! then you had a hand in it?"

"Oh, no, not by any means. He met with an accident last night."

"Accident?"

"Yes; fell into a very deep hole."

"The mischief you say! How did that happen?"

"Frank Armstrong had the shuffle and deal."

"Enough said. That is the best news I have heard in a year. No chance for mistake?"

"Didn't you see enough of him last night to answer that question?"

"Well, that's so."

"Nobody but Deadwood Dick could handle himself the way he did, even if we hadn't the additional proof of Tom's recognizing him. Oh, we had the right party, sure enough."

"And that is all?"

"Well, we want to understand one another, so if inquiry is made for him, you know."

"Ah! sure enough."

"We have not seen the man; no one of that name has been here; no one has seen him. We know absolutely nothing about him or his business here, whatever it was."

"Why, certainly, that is understood."

"Better have it mentioned. I was just telling Tom we are on the road to success, with plain sailing."

"It looks like it."

"It is so. Nothing must come in the way, and if anything does, it must be removed. Too big a lay-out to allow it to be spoiled."

"Well, rather, I should say."

"We had run the old game just as long as possible, and it would soon have played out."

"Nothing truer. But we took the thing in hand and laid the foundation for another and better before the old foundation gave way. No one can get on to our Keely cure."

"Ha! ha! That was the cleverest thought that ever came to us."

They all laughed heartily.

"And the best of it is," said the mayor's son, "that it is a genuine institution."

"Ha! ha! ha! And think of it," added Dalton, "we have Joyful Jimmie for the first patient! I have put the professor up to his game, and there will be some fun."

Again they laughed.

"Well," explained the mayor, "the thing as planned is this: The fact will be established that the house is not haunted and never was, and the Keely cure will be boomed so largely that it can't help being a success. We'll dispense a boon and blessing on the one hand, and on the other—"

"And on the other scoop in the blessed shekels," assumed Dalton.

"While no one on earth will ever be able to get on to our game," from the mayor's son.

"You have fixed the professor, then?"

"Yes, he understands fully what is required."

"And he will take steps toward laying the ghosts and proving that it was a myth?"

"He has already done that, having engaged Handsome Harry and Felix Shea to watch there, and whatever Handsome Harry says will go."

"The deuce!" from the mayor, and he knit his brows in anger.

"What is the matter?" demanded Dalton.

"I wish he had left Sport Harry out of it, and the other fellow, too, for that matter."

"Why, they are the very ones I suggested to him."

"From something the sport said this morning I am inclined to think he holds suspicion against us for the disappearance of Deadwood Dick—that is, the fellow last night."

"Pshaw! what's the difference if he does? He has got to admit that the fellow was Tiger Joe. His disappearance is proof of that; he took himself off."

"I know; but don't you think Handsome Harry is too all-fired sharp for the purpose? He is a fellow that isn't to be taken in easily."

"Yet he swallowed the ghost story."

"He has never given it any attention, that I am aware of, but is going to do so now."

"Well, there is one thing to our credit, anyhow, and we can close the account in that direction any time we see fit."

"What is that?"

"He will be at our mercy when in the Hough mansion, and if we find we have reason to fear him for anything, it will be an easy matter to send him in quest of Deadwood Dick."

"That is so. But, I'd rather you wouldn't mention that name."

"Not safe to do so," intimated Tom.

"Maybe you are right. I'll be more mindful. If that is all I'll drop out again as I dropped in, for it may be just as well for us not to have too much private business at present. So-long."

And with that, and a wink, Seth Dalton left them.

CHAPTER XI.

DEADWOOD DICK'S DUNGEON.

Deadwood Dick, when he had rested a few minutes, allowing his strained muscles to regain their normal condition, felt around to learn where he was.

He still retained a firm hold upon the rope, for he did not know what moment something would happen and he had tested the rope sufficiently to know that it was to be depended on.

The footing where he stood seemed perfectly secure, a shelf, in fact, of the solid rock. And as he reasoned he came to the conclusion that it was a place made there for a person to stand on to ring the bell; the fact that the rope was secured there so indicated.

Feeling the place over with his feet, he found that it was about three feet wide, and ran back farther than he could reach without letting go his hold on the rope.

Having satisfied himself that he was on safe footing, he let go of the rope, and fishing his match-box out of his side-pocket, speedily had light, and was enabled to take a survey of his prison quarters.

It was not a charming place.

There was first a deep, dark shaft, more or less round, and the shelf on which he stood.

Then the rope, a big one, the end secured to a ring in the side of the wall within easy reach of any one standing on the platform. Most important of all, he saw a door.

This had the appearance of being of iron and painted.

The match was ready to go out, and he lighted another.

As the second one blazed up he tried the door, to find it locked.

"As might be expected," he said to himself. "The predicament is about as bad as possible. I guess it is stay here or shin up the rope."

He discovered, however, that the bolt of the lock was not incased, and it struck him that perhaps it could be moved.

Trying it, he found that his thought was a right one.

Had he been on the other side he could not possibly have opened the door without the key, but here he could!

The bolt was flung back; the door swung open, outward, and with another lighted match he stepped into a passage with a flight of stairs some distance away at the end.

He closed the door, and at once advanced to the stairs.

Then, lighting another match, he took his way up, and at the top found a landing and another door similar to the one that opened to the shaft, and he found no difficulty in opening it.

It opened into a cellar—a cellar of the usual sort, extending under the main part of the house.

It contained little or nothing save some rubbish, and the door, when closed, he found was painted and sanded to correspond with the rest of the wall.

Without a good light it would be likely to escape discovery for an indefinite period.

The stairs leading up from the cellar were in an opposite corner, and striking another match, he crossed over and went up.

The door at the top was of the ordinary kind, and was, he found, not locked, so he passed out into what evidently was the kitchen of the house, and on a shelf near at hand he found candles.

This was what he desired, and quickly had a better light.

He was now in the house proper, and congratulated himself upon his good fortune, though he would not care to enter in the same manner again.

Looking around, he found that everything was in readiness for the opening of the house on the morrow. Provisions were there in quantities, and as he looked at these a new and unique idea came to him.

Why not take up his abode here for a time and let it appear that he had really met the fate intended for him?

What would so well suit his purpose?

"That is what I will do," he decided quickly, "provided that I can get along with the ghosts, and I'll have to take the risk of that. In fact, why not be a ghost myself?"

He chuckled as the idea struck him.

His foes had every reason to suppose that he was dead. Why not confirm their belief?

Thrown into the horrible shaft of death—as he mentally called it, he had struck the bell rope with sufficient force to sound the bell once, and then something had struck the bottom far below.

Dick did not know what that was, but supposed that it was a block or timber that had been dislodged from somewhere by the sudden jerk on the rope.

"Just what I will do," was his decision. "I will take up my abode here, for the time being, and, if necessary, will play a ghost game toward carrying out the work that has brought me here. I am on the right trail, not a doubt of it."

He set out on an exploring expedition through the house.

There was nothing unusual about its appearance, save that its plan was rather odd.

No two rooms appeared to be on the same level, steps leading from one to another, one two, or three, as the case might be, and some of the rooms were queer in shape.

The place had been refurnished throughout, as stated, and presented a new, clean, and wholesome appearance. There were many separate rooms evidently for the patients of the institution, and in the main parlor was a grand piano. It was, all together, palatial.

Dick had made up his mind to one thing.

Knowing what he did about the secret way to the dark shaft, he believed that that was the outlet and inlet for the spooks.

More than that, judging by what he had seen and by the odd shape of the interior of the house, he believed that there were other secret passages leading here and there behind the walls, so he resolved to investigate further.

Going back to the kitchen, he there found a basket, which he filled with such of the provisions as could be eaten without cooking, and thus provided, he descended to the cellar, and by the secret door into the place beyond, closing the door after him and carefully putting the bolt back in its place, that no one could know that it had been slipped.

Going on down to the passage, he there put away his basket and proceeded to investigate carefully. The result was a surprise even to himself. He learned more than enough to confirm all the suspicions he had had about the place, as well as sufficient to assure him that his life would not be worth a penny if he were to be discovered and caught.

Till long past midnight he investigated, and finally, tired, he put out his light and lay down to sleep, in a place he had selected for his headquarters.

CHAPTER XII.

JOYFUL JIMMIE DISOBEYS.

Early in the forenoon the hustle and bustle in and around the Hough mansion began.

Professor Morritson, with his assistants and servants, took formal possession, and in a little while things began to assume shipshape.

Edward Murphy, the advance agent, had been made superintendent of the concern, and he took hold as if he fully understood what was required of him and knew how to perform it.

Joyful Jimmie was loitering near, waiting for the front windows to open, indicative that the institution was ready for business.

While he stood waiting Felix Shea sauntered out and greeted him.

"Well, Joyful, it is on hand ye are, Oi see."

"Yes, and it is dry I am, too, as you sometimes say yourself," was the response.

"Sure, ye are dhe last mon in dhe wuruld dhat Oi would have expicted would want to go to a Keely cure, Joyful Jimmie, so ye are."

"Et ain't the cure I am after, as I told ye, pard."

"I know, but mebbey you'll git it all dhe same. Sure, it is a big risk ye are runnin', begob."

"If I thought there was any risk, you can bet your hat I would be the last man to tackle it, but I believe I am proof

against anything they can produce, Felix. I am to have all the lush I want to swill, the very best at that, and not a cent to pay. Wouldn't I be a plum howling idiot to let such a chance go by?"

"Hould yer whist!" cried Felix. "Sure it is makin' me mouth wather ye are, and Oi have a notion to go off and jine it mesel'."

"Come right along— But hold on, have you got the hundred?"

"Divil a wan av it."

"That settles it. I am in it and you are not, my son. But, no matter; maybe I can get a show to lift a bottle of something good and pass it out to you."

"Whist! Will ye do dhat same, Joyful?"

"I will if I kin, Felix, sure as my name is Jim Joy."

"Begorra, Oi always said ye was a foine mon, Joyful, and here's dhe proof av it!"

"Ye see, it is like this, as I told ye: The old perfesser told me I was to have all I wanted before the cure commenced, and just before they commence the cure I'm goin' to stop."

"Well, it is hopin' dhat ye won't be desaved, ould pard."

"They will have to wake early to fool an old bird like me, now I'm tellin' ye, Felix."

"And you won't forget your promise to me? Sure, Oi will depind on ye, and may dhe devil bag yer bones av ye go back on me."

"I'll not forget ye, Felix, lad."

"See that ye don't. I'll tell ye phwat, Joyful."

"What is that?"

"You sample dhe lot, and dhen bring me av dhe best dhe shebang affords."

"That is just what I will do. Have your eye peeled for me sometime this afternoon, and if chance offers I will make ye as joyful as I am myself—I mean if it's possible."

"Sure, Oi don't expect ye to perfarm a miracle, Joyful; but do dhe best ye can."

"Hillo! Up goes ther curtains."

It was even so; the windows had been opened and the curtains were being raised.

"So-long to ye, Felix!" cried Joyful, with a wave of the hand. "I am now about to penetrate the mysteries of this snake-charming establishment."

"So-long, ould fri'nd!" cried Felix. "May ye have a joyful toime av it, and may yure stomach be proof against dhe worst dheys have got an' dheys thry on any thricks wid ye. Moind dhe ghosts!"

"Waugh! I care nothing for ghosts when I'm on the still hunt for spirits."

Shea laughed, and the bumper made for the sanitarium.

He mounted the steps that led to the front entrance and gave a pull at the bell.

The door was opened by the professor himself, who greeted the "patient" with his blandest smile and a shake of the hand, saying:

"My friend, you are prompt. Welcome to the retreat."

"I am always prompt, on business of this kind," asserted Joyful. "Let's git right down to business, perfesser."

"Very well, my good man, I am all prepared for you."

"Where is it?"

"Your room?"

"No, no, I mean the snake p'ducer."

"Ah! I see. That is up in your room. Follow me, and I'll show you."

The professor led the way up the stairs to a well-furnished room at the rear on the next floor.

There, on a table, were several bottles, with a glass handy, and the bumper was about to make a rush when the professor laid a detaining hand on his arm.

"Just a word of caution," he said.

"Say it quick!"

"You see there are several bottles here, my man."

"Yes, yes."

"Well, this one," indicating, "is the one you are at liberty to take as you please, but the others are reserved. Do you understand?"

"Yes, yes; is that all?"

"That is all. Take as freely as you desire of this bottle, but my advice is to let all the rest alone until I tell you to go ahead. Now I will leave you to yourself."

"Won't you take suthin' 'fore ye go?"

"I? I take something? My good man, my appetite was destroyed long ago."

"Mercy on ye, perfesser, what a wretched critter you must be! Well, hyar is lookin' at ye with both eyes shut. May yer business prosper and yer cures be many."

"Amen, to that," said the professor.

Joyful had poured out nearly a full glass from the bottle to which his attention had been directed, and he drained it without taking it from his lips.

"Ah! but that's nectar!" he cried, as he wiped his mouth on his coat-sleeve.

"You enjoy it?"

"The best I ever tasted, on my word."

"Very well; make the most of it; but mind what I said about the other bottles."

"All right, perfesser; don't you worry about me. Let me know when I am wanted fer dinner, that's all. So-long!"

The professor smiled and withdrew, and Jimmie was left to himself, in an Eden, with forbidden fruit within his reach.

He picked up the bottles, one after another, and looked at them.

All had been uncorked and the stoppers were only loosely set in the necks, making the temptation all the greater.

One after another he held them up to the light, viewing their contents, and, having done that, he removed the corks one after another and took a long smell.

"Dang it!" he exclaimed, as he returned to the first bottle for another imbibition. "I wonder why he don't want me to tickle my palate with what's in them bottles? I believe he is mindful of expense, that's what!"

Having taken the second drink, he went through the same process as before with the other bottles, but he did not stop at that. He poured a trifle from each, one after the other, just to see what the taste was like, for surely there was no harm in that.

Needless to follow the process further. By the time dinner was ready Jolly Jimmie was in a condition to justify his name, and was as happy as if he owned the whole establishment.

Would there be a penalty for his disobedience, however?

We shall see.

CHAPTER XIII.

INTERVIEWED BY THE GHOSTS.

Soon after dinner the professor visited Jimmie. The camp bumper was in spirits galore, and had just topped off his dinner with a dose from one of the forbidden bottles.

"Well, my man, how do I find you?" the professor asked.

"As joyful as kin be," was the assurance. "Perfesser, this hyar is Arcady!"

"I am glad to find you doing so well and so much at home in your new surroundings. Believe me, a contented mind is half the battle."

"Half a bottle?"

"I said battle, sir."

"Oh! I beg parding. I was goin' to say that half a bottle is not a contented mind."

"What!" with a glance at the table. "You have not emptied your bottle already, my good fellow? Verily, you are in need of rescue, if ever man was!"

"I am tryin' to do my part, perfesser. You said fill myself, and I have been obeyin' orders."

"But, the other bottles; I hope—"

A start.

"What's the matter, perfesser?"

"Good heavens! You have been at them all!"

"Well, when one went dry, what was a feller to do, perfesser?"

"Why did you not notify me?"

"I hated to disturb ye, and as I had finished the first, I thought it was all right."

"But, you have been at them all!"

"Yes; ye see, I had to try 'em to decide which one was nearest like the first. I hope thar ain't no harm done, perfesser."

"No great harm, no, but you are taking your case into your own hands when you disregard my directions. That will never do, for this is a matter of science, and has to be conducted scientifically."

"Perfesser, yer fears are groundless. Ef you kin find a man that kin gulp likker any more scientifically 'n what I kin, I'll treat."

"The damage is done, my man."

"What damage?"

"You have mixed the liquors. But, no matter, now, I will fill this bottle again, and this time with water—"

"Water!"

"Yes."

"And you expect me to drink water?"

"I advise you to drink it, and not touch one of these other bottles till it is all gone."

The professor moved toward the door, and the bumner looked at him in sheer amazement. Drink water, he? What was the man thinking about?

"Perfesser," he protested, "don't, don't, I beg of ye! You gave me the surance that a man's life was in no danger hyer, while under treatment, and now ye are goin' back on yer word."

"But, you have disobeyed directions."

"I can't help it, perfesser, I can't drink water; don't ask me to do the impossible."

"Well, you are determined to take your case in your own hands, I see. I will not insist upon the point, but do not drink any more of these liquors for at least an hour."

"Goodness bless ye, perfesser, that is a lighter sentence."

The smiling professor was about to withdraw when there came a dull, heavy, muffled, yet sonorous stroke of a ponderous bell.

It seemed to make the mansion shiver with its voice; the very floors seemed to vibrate, and Joyful Jimmie leaped to his feet, while the professor stared helplessly.

"What was that?" demanded Joyful.

"I don't know," was the response. "I heard it last night, a similar resonant stroke."

"It is the ghost bell, that is what it is," declared Joyful. "But, let 'er ring; they have got to play a stronger game 'n that to scare me off."

It was some moments before the sound

of the bell died away, and it was not heard again. The professor went down to his office, where he found the clock indicated the hour of one.

Jimmie took a pull at one of the bottles to strengthen his nerves, and then a sip from another bottle to take the taste of the first out of his mouth, and still another to remove the taste of that; for, somehow, none of it seemed to be just right.

The chair he occupied was an easy one, and, reclining in it, he was soon asleep.

When he awoke, an hour later, it was with a start.

Had some one called him?

"Joyful Jimmie?"

It was a voice very distinct, but not very loud.

"Wull, hyer I am," called out Joyful, sitting up and staring around. "Who aire you?"

There was no one in the room with him, and he was at a loss to account for the voice. Who was it had spoken?

"I am the invisible, the ghost of the mansion," was the solemn reply. "But, be not alarmed; take a drink to my health and your nerves and I will speak further."

Joyful's eyes were fairly bulging.

"Well, you are a ghost of hoss sense, anyhow," he declared, and he at once set about following the advice given.

He drew a wry face as he gulped the liquor, however, and wiped his mouth vigorously after he had taken it. Somehow it did not suit his taste. He would see the professor.

"Now, what is it?" he demanded.

"You have a friend named Felix Shea, have you not?"

"Yes; and by tarnel, thar is somethin' I had forgot all about, too! Go on."

"Well, he is out by the side of the Dalton House, looking wistfully in this direction, and I think you had better go out and see him."

"Yes, I must do that. He will never fergive me in the world, if I do not keep my word with him. Ye see, ghost, I promised to take him a bottle of stuff if I had a supply—"

He stopped short, realizing that he was betraying a secret.

"I see," said the voice. "You had better keep your word with him, and at the same time you can do a favor for me."

"What is it?"

"First give me your promise that you will tell no one else that I have spoken to you."

"Yes, I promise that."

"If you keep your word you need have no dread of me, for I will not harm you. No matter what you may hear and see in this house, do not be in the least alarmed, for I will protect you."

"A bargain!"

"On the other hand, if you do not keep your word, the very worst that I can invent will be your portion—"

"Don't mention it, ghost; you won't have no 'casion to carry it out, not a word of it. I'll do what you want me to, and fer that you are to leave me in peaceful possession of my room and likkers."

"Very well, and now attend me."

Joyful had at once located the voice as coming from a certain part of the wall at one end of the room, so had moved in that direction, and the words had been exchanged in low tones.

The bumner, giving close attention, evidently was greatly impressed, for he was somewhat sobered when he returned to the table for another dose of his "elixir ambrosia." But the taste of it was growing obnoxious.

Putting on his hat, he selected the fullest bottle—and, by the way, the one he liked least. Putting this under his coat, he left the room, and, passing quietly down the stairs and out of the house, he turned his steps in the direction of the Dalton House.

There, sure enough, was Felix, waiting for him, and when the Irishman saw the bumner coming, slightly unsteady in his gait, and holding something under his coat with care, a smile lighted his face.

"He is kapin' his promise, begob!" he cried. "Sure, Oi can fergive him, so Oi can. How joyful he looks! Begorra, it is as full as a tick he is, and as happy as a clam! Maybe, now, he can tell me something about dhe bell dhat rang; Oi must ask him."

CHAPTER XIV.

A BEWILDERED QUARTETTE.

Mayor Godwin was in his office when his son and the superintendent of the Rose Mine entered.

The Superintendent, Frank Armstrong, was rather good-looking but roughly clad, as became his every-day station.

It was about the same time that Joyful Jimmie left the sanitarium to keep his engagement with his friend Felix. They found the mayor in, as said, and Seth Dalton entered right behind them.

"What is wanted, dad?" inquired the son.

"The signal was rather sharp, and I came at once," observed Armstrong. "Fell in with Tom as I came along."

"About that bell," explained the mayor.

"Just what I thought," observed Dalton. "You heard it, then?"

"Could anybody help hearing it? Confound it! There is a crowd staring at the house now."

They could see the house from the rear windows.

"More care must be taken," said Dalton. "Who was in the house? Who was it rang it?"

"That is just what I want to know," cried Godwin. "It was a confounded piece of carelessness, and what business had any one there at this hour of the day, anyhow?"

They looked from one to another in a puzzled manner.

"I heard it, of course, but I thought it was one of you three," from the superintendent.

"We are the only ones having keys to get in, and I am like Frank, I thought it was one of you others," added Tom.

"And it certainly wasn't me," declared Dalton.

"Nor me," echoed Godwin.

"Then who the mischief was it, and how was it done?" demanded the mayor, greatly excited.

"Can it be that some of the people have stumbled upon the secret of the old ranch already?" questioned Dalton.

"Next to impossible," thought Armstrong.

"How about—you know?" from the mayor.

"Dead as a door-nail," averred Armstrong, without a tremor. "I heard him strike the side and then the bottom when he went down. The bell gave out a stroke then, if you remember."

"And you said the man struck the rope."

"As I supposed."

"And you are sure of his fate—"

"Just as I tell you; I listened and heard him strike."

"No question about his fate, then,"

decided Tom. "But, who rang this time?"

"It was just one o'clock," asserted the mayor. "The clock here had just struck, and the tone of the bell came right on top of it, made me think it was like a town clock."

They glanced at the dial as the mayor called attention to it, and it wanted but a minute of two o'clock.

"That does not answer my question," protested Tom. "There is no town clock about it; some hand pulled that rope, and we must find out whose it was. And yet we cannot do that until night, for we must not be seen going near the house. I am puzzled, and—"

The clock struck the hour of two.

Barely had it ceased, when clong! went the great bell over in the haunted house, and again—clong!

The four men in the room leaped to their feet, their faces pale as they looked at one another in bewilderment. It was something they could not understand.

"By heavens, if it isn't a town clock, it is mighty like one!" the mayor asserted.

"What is the meaning of it?" demanded the others.

"That is for us to find out," declared Tom Godwin, determinedly. "This night we must investigate, and lay the ghost if we can."

"The ghost?"

"Well, it looks like one now, don't it?"

"Hang me if it don't," asseverated Armstrong, who was paler than the rest, "I don't know what to make of it."

"It must be that the fellow you—"

"Not a word! I tell you that is simply impossible; I heard him strike the bottom."

"What I was going to say," continued Tom, "maybe it is his ghost that is now taking things in hand, making a reality of our former make-believe."

"It is nothing to jest about," snapped Armstrong. "Here comes the professor this way; we had better get out before he comes. No doubt he is coming to make inquiry about the bell."

Armstrong did not tarry, but left at once, Dalton and Tom Godwin soon following.

The professor could not see them leave the office from the direction he was approaching, and he entered a few minutes after they had gone.

"See here, how is this, mayor?" the head of the Keely cure demanded.

"How is what?" asked the mayor.

"That bell."

"What about it?"

"Didn't you hear it?"

"Certainly, sir."

"Well, it has frightened some of my servants half out of their wits. They have heard about the place being haunted, and I don't believe I'll be able to keep them there."

"I wish I could help you, sir."

"Confound it! Do you mean to tell me that it is not your doings?"

"On my word, professor, I am as much puzzled as you are."

Prof. Morritson looked the amazement he felt, and he stared at the mayor as if unable to comprehend.

"Did you not tell me that the ghost business was something you had been working for a purpose; that if I would come here and open this gold cure you would not only give me rent free, but pay the expenses if it proved a losing venture? Wasn't that the agreement?"

"Not so loud, professor. Yes, that was the agreement, certainly."

"Yes, but didn't you say the other? And didn't you say that I was to have the honor of proving that the house was not haunted, and of laying the ghosts? And now you tell me that you don't know anything about this bell! What am I to make of such inconsistency, sir?"

"Everything is just as represented, sir."

"No, it is not! You say you do not control the ringing of this bell. If not you, then who?"

"As I have just told you, I am as much puzzled as you are. We are going to investigate it to-night, and no doubt we'll be able to set the matter right and explain it."

"But by night my servants will be gone and my business ruined! If that bell sounds once more they will desert me!"

"Ha! a happy thought for you, sir."

"What is it?"

"Understand me that I know nothing about the matter; that I am puzzled completely; but, if at three o'clock that bell strikes the hour again, tell your people that it is a clock you have discovered."

The look of anxiety left the professor's face instantly.

"Well, that is clever, on my word, it is!" he admitted. "I don't see, though, why you need deny knowledge of it to me. Now I understand, sir."

"But, professor, believe me, it is something I do not understand at all; it is nothing of our doing, and I can't account for it, sir."

"Good, sir, good! I understand fully. You disclaim all knowledge; I am to discover what it is—that it is a clock set somewhere in the wall; I am to lay the ghosts and reclaim the house from its bad name. Clever, sir, decidedly, and I thank you for the manner in which you have given me the clew to the mystery, as a detective might say."

And so, with nods and chuckles, the professor bowed himself out and returned to the house, while the mayor paced the floor of his office, face troubled.

CHAPTER XV.

JOYFUL JIMMIE ALARMED.

"Well, how goes it, Joyful? Sure, ye look as merry as a merry-maker!"

So cried Felix Shea, when Joyful Jimmie drew near, and he advanced a step to shake hands with him.

"Don't make a show of yourself hyar, and give me away, boy!" chided the bummer. "Let's go around back of the stables, and there I'll tickle yer palate."

"Begorra, Oi knew ye would not forget me. Come on, and lave me see phwat koind av swill dhey are giving ye over dhere, anyhow."

"That is jist what I want to do, Felix, and I want you to say how ye like it."

"Dhat same Oi will, ould mon."

They moved around to a place out of sight, and there stopped.

"Now, here it is," and Joyful produced the bottle from under his coat.

The young Irishman's eyes fairly danced as he took it, and he called down a blessing upon the head of his old friend and drank to his health and long life.

"Ah! but dhat is dhe stuff!" he exclaimed, when he let go.

"Then you like it?" asked Joyful.

"Never betther did Oi ever taste in me loife, ould mon."

In proof of that, he put it to his lips again, while Joyful looked on ruefully and jealously.

He was at a loss to account for it, but somehow his taste was going back on him—as he put it mentally, though he did not admit it to Felix.

"Have a dhrap?" Felix invited.

"No, I have been swigging it all day and have got lots more in my room, so keep it all for yerself," returned the old fellow, generously.

"May yure shadow never grow less, and may dhe sun never set on yure possessions!" cried the happy Irishman. "Sure, and dhe places here would ownly kape dhe loikes av dhis!"

Joyful could not understand, yet a terrible truth was dawning upon him. He sadly shook his head.

"Well ye may shake yure head, ould mon," said Felix.

But he had misinterpreted.

"Now, I am hyar on business as well as pleasure," announced the camp bum. "I have a message fer Sport Harry dhat you are to deliver jist as ye hear it."

"A missage! And who is it from?"

"The ghost of the mansion."

"Phwat dhe ould mischief has a ghost to do wid a message?"

"That is not for you to ask nor for me to know; all you have got to do is to carry it to the sport and say nothing."

"Well, foire ahead, and let me have it."

"Handsome Harry is wanted to come there this evening, and he is to come and pay me a visit in my room."

"Begorra, dhat reminds me! Sure it is mesel' and Handsome Harry dhat are to spind dhe noight in dhe ould house fur dhe very purpose av laying dhe ghost, so we are."

"How comes that about?"

"Dhe perfesser has engaged dhe pair av us."

"Well, now, that may alter things considerably. But, carry the message to Harry, and maybe he will come and see me at once."

"Begorra, Oi'll do it. And, Oi say, Joyful."

"What is it?"

"Would it be any harrum av Oi call on ye mesel', say about dhe toime dhis bottle goes dhry?"

"Come and welcome!" cried Jimmie. "I have a fine place there, a genuine palace, and, as fer drinks—yer choice of half a dozen kinds."

"Ye may look fur me card!" cried Felix.

While they were still in conversation the bell sounded forth, as elsewhere mentioned.

"Dhere! phwat is dhe m'aning av dhat, Oi want to ask ye?" cried Felix. "See dhe galoots, how dhey run and stare at the place!"

"Why, it is the ghost, as you know well enough," averred the bummer. "He has set up a clock, I take it, to excite the curiosity of the galoots hyar. He knows what he's about."

They were looking out from the place to which they had retreated, and while they looked they saw the professor come from the house.

His face was troubled, and he made straight for the mayor's office.

About the same time they saw the others leave the office.

"Thar!" exclaimed Joyful, "that saves me a bother, by mighty! The ghost wanted me to find out what those fellers wur at about this time o' day."

"Phwat fellows?" asked Felix.

"The ones ye see comin' out of Godwin's office."

"Oh-ho! It seems to me dhat ghost has a moighty big interest in earthly t'ings fur a ghost, Joyful."

"Never you mind," chided the bummer. "You go and find Handsome Harry at once and tell him everything I have said, and add that he had better come right away."

"Consider it done, Joyful."

"And you see that you don't draw no more on that bottle account until ye have done it, too."

They parted, Felix to look up Sport Harry and deliver the message and Jimmie to return to the inebriates' sanitarium.

Joyful was just in time to fall in with the professor on his way back from his call at the mayor's office, and at sight of his patient he exclaimed:

"What! you out, sir?"

"Yes, I wanted to see a friend," explained the patient.

"Well, your friends must come and see you, not you go and see them," averred the professor.

"That is jist the p'int, perfesser," declared the bummer. "I wanted to see 'em, and I thought the quickest way would be to go and invite 'em."

"Well, for the dignity of the establishment, sir, pray make use of the servants to deliver your message. You are unable to walk half straight, and only attract attention. Wait until we send you forth a free man once more, so that you can walk with head erect."

"Oh, they all know me, perfesser, and any little irregularity about my gait won't do no harm to your establishment. I was 'flicted that way 'fore you came hyar. But, I say, perfesser."

"What is it?"

"What is the matter with that likker in my room? I think you had better send up a fresh supply."

"Ah-ha! So soon?"

"What d'ye mean?"

"My dear man, you have taken your case into your own hands. You are going to be desperately sick before long, and after that you will not taste of the cursed drink for the richest mine in this gulch!"

Jimmie looked anything but joyful just then.

"Ye don't mean et," he gasped.

"As I live."

"Great Goshen! Why, life won't be worth the livin', perfesser!"

"On the contrary, man, you will just begin to live. You will bless the day when you put yourself under my hands."

"Ruined, ruined!" cried the bummer. "My fine taste for old corn completely gone, strayed, stolen, destroyed! Perfesser, I'll bring suit fer damages, as my name is Jim Joy!"

"Why, man, it was a bargain; everybody knows the conditions. But you will bless me rather than curse me, later on."

"Yes, but ye deceived me, blast ye!"

"In what particular?"

"I thought it took a week fer the thing to act, and— and—"

"And you thought to have a good drunk and then retire and laugh at me, did you? Ha! ha! ha! My friend, you fell into a trap of your own setting. You are a cured man!"

"Well, there is one satisfaction, anyhow," assured the bum. "Misery loves company, and when my friend Felix Shea calls to see me, as he sartain sure will, all I ask of you is that you send up a supply of your best for me to entertain him with. See?"

CHAPTER XVI.

THE HANDSOME SPORT INITIATED.

Jimmie went on and entered the house, but the professor stopped to speak to a group of men who had collected in front and who were idly staring.

"What is it, my boys?" the professor asked.

"Wull, we wur wonderin' whar that 'ar bell kin be," explained one.

"That bell? The ghost that you have heard so much about, and all of that? My dear, good men, the mystery has been solved. That bell is a great clock in the walls."

"A clock?"

"Yes, you may hear it strike again. Do not be surprised if you do. You may tell your friends that there is no more ghost in this mansion."

"Wull, by gosh!" exclaimed the fellow, and as the professor smiled and entered the house, they hastened off to herald the news.

Inside, the professor informed his superintendent the same, and he made it known to all the rest of the household so that fears were allayed immediately. When the bell was heard at three o'clock and again at four and five, the inmates of the mansion merely smiled.

But it was not so with the evil crew of Gold Dust—Mayor Godwin, his son, Seth Dalton, Frank Armstrong, and with some others more or less concerned with them. They were not only puzzled, but greatly alarmed, and were impatient for night to fall in order that they might investigate.

Before that, however, Sport Harry had called at the Hough mansion, ostensibly to see Joyful Jimmie, but really in response to the summons he had received, and he spent some time in Jimmie's room.

When he took leave of the bum he knew more than when he had entered his confederate's room.

Shortly after Harry had gone Felix Shea called.

He was considerably the worse for his recent indulging, but was readily admitted to the sanitarium, and when shown up to Jimmie's room he was royally entertained.

Jimmie felt a sickness working upon him, but he kept up manfully while he pressed glass after glass upon Felix, until at last he had the satisfaction of seeing his Irish friend most delightfully "corned," when he yielded to urgent inclination and threw himself on the bed.

So we leave them, to go with the Handsome Sport.

In leaving the room, the sport looked carefully around before descending the stairs.

He had been in the house before, so knew its plan fairly well. His object being to reach the cellar unseen, if possible, he descended the stairs with all caution.

Reaching the bottom without being seen, he walked lightly along the hall to the rear and opened a door that connected the kitchen with the dining-rooms on the same floor by a pantry and passage combined. Had any one been there, he had an excuse ready.

No one was there; something had drawn the attention of the servants at the moment.

He looked into the kitchen, and he heard them talking in the rear yard.

Without delay he stepped into the kitchen, opened the door of the cellar, passed in and closed the door after him, and descended the steps to the bottom, where he paused and listened.

He heard no sound, and chirped three times, like a cricket.

"All right! come this way!" was what he heard.

Harry advanced in the direction of the voice, and as he did so a match was struck and light was shed upon the scene.

There, in an opening in the wall, the sport beheld Trump Finnegan in the act of lighting a candle he held in his hand. The sport joined him and they shook hands.

"No one saw you?" Dick asked.

"No one; it happened that the way was all clear."

"So much the better. We will spring a surprise on these scamps, I imagine."

"Yes, and serve them out for the scurvey trick they played on you," remarked Harry. "I thought you were more than plain Trump Finnegan, but—"

"But you did not take me to be Deadwood Dick, eh?"

"No, never suspected."

They had now entered the space beyond the cellar, and Dick had shut the door and replaced the bolt of the lock.

"Well, now, if you will come with me I will show you some wonderful things," Dick advised, as he led the way down the stairs. "I did not think there was much to the place at first, but I have found there is a good deal."

"And you mean to play the ghost and show it up, eh?"

"That is what I am doing."

"You are the one who rings the bell?"

"Yes. I suppose you see my motive in that?"

"I don't know. The people in the house take it for a clock that is somewhere in the walls."

"The very idea I wanted to convey to their minds," assented Dick. "I venture to say it is a puzzle to the rascals themselves, however."

"It must be a mystery."

"You see, I want to awaken their curiosity so that they will venture here to-night to find out what it is all about. Thinking me dead, they must be wondering who is doing it."

"Ha! that is your scheme, eh? It is a clever one, on my word."

"That is the programme, and I want you to help me carry it out. Here, now, is the door opening on the shaft I told you about."

He opened the door as he spoke, and the cold air of the dismal hole came out upon them, causing Handsome Harry to draw back with a feeling of disgust for the place.

"And they threw you down there!" he exclaimed.

"That is the fate the fellow gave me," averred Dick, "but Providence carried me to the rope."

"It must have been Providence, sure enough. You had not one chance in ten thousand, I should say. But, tell me all about the place."

"I have more than once had reason to believe that I am an instrument in the hands of Providence," assumed Dick, reverently. "Some of my escapes have been little short of miraculous. As to the place, I will lead you through it. Let us wait until I ring the bell at the hour."

Dick had his watch in hand.

There was but a short time to wait, and closing the watch, Dick grasped the rope and tolled out the hour.

"They will be in a fever of curiosity by the time it is dark," he explained to Harry. "Now, then, follow me, and we will make the rounds. By the way, I have arranged another plan for ringing the bell, too."

"What for?"

"They will watch to see how it is done, and they will hear it ring without a tremor of the rope."

"Ha! that will give them a nut to crack, sure enough. But how will you do that?"

"Why, I have been up to the bell, and have attached a string to the clapper and have conducted it to the place where we will lie in waiting for them. I have it all planned."

"I guess you have."

Dick now held the light so that his companion could see, and disclosed a narrow, circular stairs around the inside of the shaft, with a rail for the hand of any one making the perilous passage.

"This," he announced, "leads to the door that opens to the outer world, and is the only means I have found of entrance save the way you came. With this way blocked, and the other stopped against them, they will be like rats in a trap when we get them here."

"Ah! I see."

"The door up there opens on the shaft," continued Dick, "but these steps and the rail begin on the right and the way is a safe one at ordinary times. It ends here, as you see, and no one could ever guess that such a place is in existence. But, come, I will show you all through, and I think you will have to vote it the greatest den you ever saw or read about. You will agree that fact beats fiction hollow."

CHAPTER XVII.

LIKE RATS IN A TRAP.

The night was dark, as the previous night had been.

And as soon as it had become thoroughly dark, two men made their way in the direction of the Hough mansion.

They approached from the side of the gulch, so as to lessen the likelihood of their being seen, and came up alongside the house on the side where the paved walk lay.

At a certain point they stopped. There was a click and a slight rasping sound, and a door opened.

They entered, and the door closed.

"Now," said one, "we'll see whether the clock will strike again or not, Tom."

"You are right, Frank," responded the other. "Just wait until I make a light and we'll go down. We'll see who is running the game, and I think we'll settle his score."

They soon had a light, and proceeded down the winding steps by aid of the hand rail.

The mayor's son reached the bottom first. There he waited for Armstrong, who was bearing the light, and they examined the door first of all.

"Locked, just as we left it," said young Godwin, looking at his companion in amazement. "The question is, how could any one get to the bell to ring it?"

"Give it up," avowed Armstrong. "Well, it wants but a couple of minutes to nine, and we'll wait and see what will be done. Not an hour has been missed since one o'clock, so far."

"And what if it rings?"

"How can it, and we here by the rope?"

"But what if it does?"

"It is impossible. Still, if it should, for sake of argument, we'll go up to the bell itself."

"That will be the only thing left for us to do. We do not take any stock in ghosts, having been ghosts ourselves for so long a time. Watch the time, now."

Thus they stood, Armstrong watch in hand, waiting for the hour.

It came.

There was a faint sound overhead; then the deep, sonorous voice of the bell spoke forth.

One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, and nine, and not a tremor of the

rope, and the two men looked at each other with faces pale. It was more than they could understand.

"What does it mean?" gasped Tom Godwin.

"I'll be hanged if I know," answered the superintendent.

"There is nothing for us to do but go up to the bell, and if any one is there—"

"If any one is there, may Satan help him, is all I have to say," grated Armstrong. "There will be another victim for the pit. Come on, and we'll soon see."

Armstrong led the way back again up the dangerous footway, to a point where there was a step that was broader than the others.

There he stopped and pushed his way into a niche in the wall, and so on and into a passage that opened beyond it, the mayor's son following him, and the light disappeared.

Along that passage they went, until they came to a stairway, and up and on through other passages until the difference in the material of the walls proved that they were moving among the partitions of the house itself. Still up and on, this way and that.

Finally, at the end of a passage to which they had had to climb by means of a ladder of considerable height, they stopped.

"The other ladder is gone," called out young Godwin.

"Proof that some human agency has been at work here," growled the superintendent.

"Well, we are not to be foiled this way," decided the mayor's son. "We will pull up the other ladder and go on up and see what is there. We have got somebody to face here."

"That is the idea!" agreed Armstrong. "Hold the light and I'll fetch it in a moment."

Tom took the light, and Frank went back along the passage.

Suddenly an oath was heard.

"What is it?"

"This ladder is gone, too!"

"No! Then we are trapped, curse the luck, trapped! We can't get up nor down!"

"But, who has taken the ladder? Has one of our number turned traitor? But, no; that is impossible, for every one is true; that we can swear. Who has served us this trick?"

"You must be mistaken about that fellow last night."

"And I tell you I am not; do you suppose a man could go down that hole and live? Besides, once down, even if unhurt, how could he get out again?"

They looked down into the passage below, but no one was there, and the depth was about twenty-four feet from where they stood, the ladder having spanned the height of two floors.

At the other end the distance to the point where the bell hung was a good thirteen feet.

They were trapped indeed.

Ten o'clock came, and the bell tolled off the hour again.

Eleven, and yet once again its solemn voice was heard, but no other sound to indicate how it had been rung.

In the mayor's office were Dalton and Godwin, pacing the floor in a fever of anxiety. For two hours they had been awaiting the return of Tom Godwin and Frank Armstrong.

"What is to be done?" questioned the mayor, as the last stroke of eleven died away.

"There is only one thing we can do, and that is, go and find them," decided

Dalton. "We may as well go at once, too. Are you ready?"

"Yes, let us go. I can't bear the suspense longer."

They put out the light and left the office, and by making a detour they approached the mansion from the rear, as the other pair had done.

Opening the door, they let themselves in and closed it again, and having so done, struck a light. A candle was at hand, in a place where they knew where to find it.

That lighted, they proceeded down to the landing where the bell rope hung, and, in short, followed almost exactly the lead of the pair who had gone before them; ascending again as far as the niche, and so on into the passages that lay beyond.

Thus they proceeded, talking all the time, until they came to a point where the absence of a ladder blocked their further progress in that direction.

"Who is there?" called a voice from above.

"Tom, is that you?"

"Yes, and you want to get back from there before you are trapped the same as we have been. The hand of a foe is at work here somewhere!"

"Then that foe is Deadwood Dick!" ejaculated the mayor. "I have repented a hundred times that I did not put a bullet into him last night, when we had him cornered in the Silver Saloon."

"Yes, Deadwood Dick it is!" said a voice, "and you are safe in his net. You may play ghost to your hearts' content."

With curses, the mayor and Dalton ran back along the passage.

At the point where they had climbed up the last ladder to the level they were then on, they found—nothing!

The ladder was gone, and they, like the others, were in a clever trap! There was no way of escape, for this was simply the route to the place where the big bell hung.

They had not spoken aloud, for, of course, had they done so, their voices would have been heard in the rooms of the house whose walls they were within; nor did they care to speak aloud; they hoped there would be a possible means of escape.

But none was to be found; they heard nothing more of their captor; twelve o'clock came, and the great bell told off the hour again; after that all was silent. The bell rang no more, and the night rolled on apace. The prisoners, unable to escape, were obliged to remain where they had been trapped, and bitter were their execrations and dire their apprehensions.

CHAPTER XVIII.

EXPOSE AND RESULTS.

Clang-clong! Clang-clong! Clang-clong!

It was early morning over Hungry Gulch and the great bell in the Hough mansion was sounding forth its deep-mouthed reverberations.

No longer could it be likened to a clock; it was a resonant, brazen bell, and it was pealing forth, though with muffled accents, what might be taken as a loud alarm.

At first it was a surprise, then it created wonder, and at length curiosity impelled the people of the town to rush pell-mell in the direction of the gold-cure to learn what it meant. And there the inmates had hurried out, all filled with terror.

Clang-clong! Clang-clong! Clang-clong! Clang-clong!

Still it rang on, and people began to question whether it would ever stop. A

great crowd had assembled, in fact the whole population of the gulch.

At last it stopped, and while the crowd yet watched and waited, as if aware that more was to follow, two men made their appearance upon the veranda of the sanitarium and were greeted with a cheer.

One was Handsome Harry, whom they all knew; the other the stranger who had come by the stage on the previous day, Trump Finnegan.

"What is et, Sport Harry?" one man called out. "What does et mean?"

"You shall hear," was the response. "Citizens of Gold Dust, let me introduce Mr. Richard M. Bristol, better known as Deadwood Dick, Junior."

Such a cheer as went up then was almost deafening. The people of Gold Dust were not unacquainted with Deadwood Dick by reputation, and they gave him the heartiest kind of welcome.

Dick raised his hand for silence, and as they were eager to hear him say something, he soon had their attention.

"Men of Gold Dust," he said, "I came to your pretty camp on business, and that business has been accomplished more quickly than I anticipated. In fact, I feel as if I have had but little to do with it, further than to figure as the instrument of the overruling Providence."

"I came here for the purpose of unearthing an illegal mint that was known to be in operation somewhere in this part of the country, and for which the Secret Service people have been searching for a long time. Harry Meyers here, whom you have known as Handsome Harry, the sport, has been here on the same business for some time, and to him I owe, in part at least, the success I have been able to achieve. We have a fine disclosure to make to you."

"Years ago, when this house was built, Seth Dalton and Alf Godwin were in the employ of Henry Hough. After Hough's death they laid a scheme by which they hoped to get hold of the property for a trifling sum. They reported the mine as played out; the business went down, and at last the mine shut down and the camp was deserted. So it rested for ten years; but Dalton and Godwin were not idle during that time. They had another iron in the fire, as well, and while the coast was all clear they fitted up a place here for the greatest counterfeiting undertaking ever heard of."

"To protect themselves, they arranged to have it appear that the old house was haunted. They, needless to say, were the ghosts. When ready, they bought the property, reopened the mines, and gave the town a boom. They prospered greatly, for a time, but at last the ghost story began to lose its hold upon the people, as you know, and they saw they would have to hatch a new scheme or give up their secret minting. What should it be? At last they hit upon the idea of opening a Keely cure, and you see the result. It was their intention to prove that the house was not haunted, and never really had been, and, under cover of this business, they would be able to carry on the minting indefinitely. But we have brought them up with a round turn now, and they are prisoners."

At length, then, he went over the whole ground, and when he had done the house was thrown open so that the whole crowd might investigate. Carefully hid away in a sub-cellar was the minting plant, one of the most perfect for counterfeiting purposes ever seen. Then, the other secrets of the house were laid bare, and the prisoners were

eventually forced to surrender, though, for a time, they were defiant. Dick arrested them, and they got what they deserved, every one.

It was shown, too, that Tom Godwin himself was the much-wanted Tiger Joe! Knowing Deadwood Dick, the scoundrel had accused him of being Tiger Joe partly for a signal to his father that Deadwood Dick was in town, and partly with the hope that the crowd would make short work of so notorious a rascal as Tiger Joe was known to be. But it did not work according to programme, as we have seen.

The gang broken up, the town took on a natural growth, supported by the numerous outlying camps, and there was one institution that it retained—the Gold Cure. So pronounced had been the cure in the cases of Joyful Jimmie and Felix Shea that others sought it, and the professor did a good business eventually. The two mentioned were terribly sick for a time, but when they recovered they could not be induced to touch liquor on any consideration. And, when they became used to it, they were thankful men, for they soon had good clothes upon their backs and money in their pockets—a state of things they had never known before, within recollection—especially Joyful Jimmie. His nickname still clung to him, and was not inappropriate, for he was joyful now in another sense.

THE END.

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